

THE W·I·L·L·O·W SOURCEBOOK™



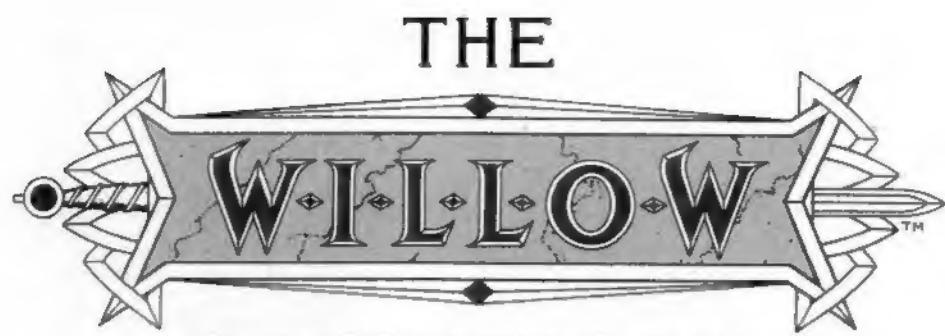
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BY ALLEN VARNEY

The people, places, monsters, and magic of George Lucas's hit film!



THE

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THE



WILLOW

SOURCEBOOK

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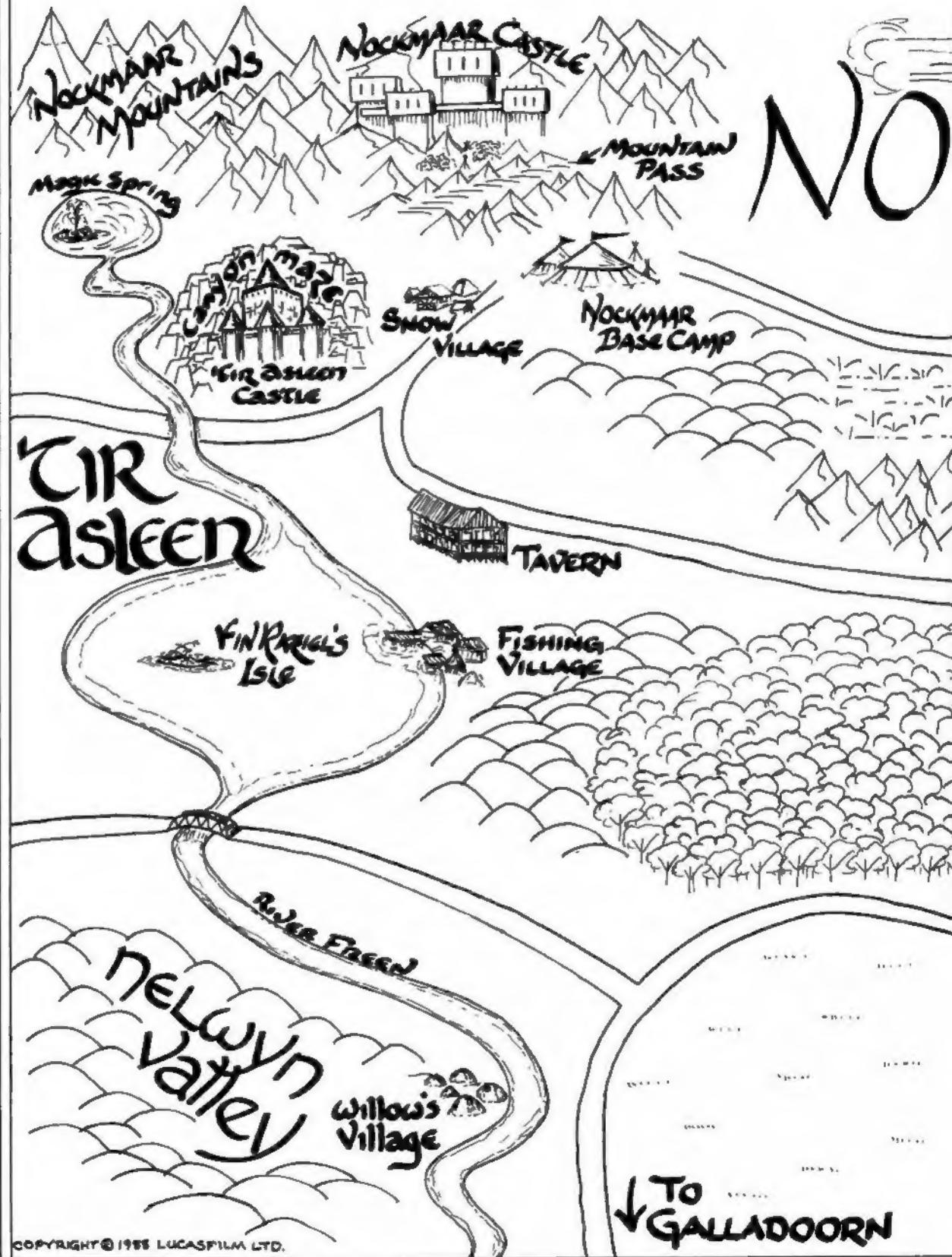
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NORTHERN WASTE OKMAAR

POHA
LANDS

SWAMPS
VALLEY of Defeat



Crossroads

Fairy
Forest

The Standing Stones

JKD

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INTRODUCTION

If you're like us, when Willow ran to Kiaya and the credits rolled, you had all sorts of questions about the world of *Willow*. George Lucas and Ron Howard's world is remarkably real and consistent, but there's only so much you can do in two hours of film—especially when you have to cram action, adventure, and special effects into every frame!

What's life in the Nelwyn village like? How did Madmartigan get trapped in the cage, anyhow? How did Bavmorda rise to power? What's the background to Airk's relationship with Madmartigan? Who is Kael, and how did he get to be Bavmorda's general?

Eric Goldberg Associates and Tor Books are proud to present the authorized sourcebook based on Lucasfilm's fantasy film. In *The Willow Sourcebook* you'll find answers to all kinds of questions—details on all the characters, monsters, magic, and kingdoms you see in the movie. Much background and many secrets are revealed for the first time anywhere.

Everything here has been checked and confirmed by Lucasfilm. The wealth of material in film and sourcebook alike carries on the George Lucas tradition of quality and imagination, already world-famous in the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* movie series. Read on!

ROLEPLAYING

What is a roleplaying game? If you already know, you can skip the rest of this section. If you're not sure what roleplaying is all about, keep reading.

Movies have to end.

But your adventures don't have to end with them.

Using the rules to a roleplaying game, you can take the part of a fantasy character and experience all the magic and adventure of a world like *Willow*'s.

In a roleplaying game, you pretend to be a "character," a person who lives in the world of a story (such as *Willow*'s world). Using the game rules, you decide what your "player character" can do, and how he or she behaves.

One person acts as the gamemaster. The gamemaster describes the game world your character lives in, the "nonplayer characters" he or she encounters, and the events that happen in the world. The gamemaster tells the story that the player characters act in. By telling the gamemaster what your characters do in response to events, you and the other players help decide the outcome of the adventure.

It's like starring in a movie, complete with scenery,

supporting cast, an action-packed plot, and maybe even a bowl of popcorn to munch on. And if you succeed in the tasks the story sets, you can get rewards of fame, fortune, and new abilities for your character.

THE GAMING NOTES

The Willow Sourcebook includes game statistics that let you adapt the movie's characters and ideas for use in the most popular fantasy roleplaying games. These "gaming notes" are found at the end of each individual entry.

If you're just interested in the background material and don't care about the gaming elements, just skip the gaming notes.

If you do want to use the gaming notes, you'll need to know the rules to a fantasy roleplaying game. There are a lot of fantasy games on the market, and any of them can be used with this sourcebook. They can be found at your local game or bookstore.

GLOSSARY

Roleplaying games use many specialized terms. Here are definitions for the terms used in our gaming notes:

ADVENTURE

A story in which players pretend to be the main characters. The gamemaster describes a situation and goal, and the players create the story of the adventure through their actions.

ATTRIBUTES

Number scores that describe a character's inborn abilities. In general, the better an ability, the higher the number score. We express most attributes on a numerical range from 3 to 18, with 18 being exceptionally high. A typical person's score is around 10.



Note that rolling 3d6 (that is, three six-sided dice) gives a number between 3 and 18. If your game system generates character attributes with 3d6 rolls, as many do, you can use the scores we provide without adjustment. Other systems use other methods for determining attributes; players of these systems should adjust these scores proportionately.

We use six different attributes in *The Willow Sourcebook*:

STRENGTH is a measure of physical power and the ability to lift, throw, or do other things that require sheer brawn.

DEXTERITY measures coordination, agility, and speed.

CONSTITUTION is a character's innate endurance and toughness.

WISDOM is a measure of a character's intuition about people and the world, and (especially in magicians) how well attuned the character is to the forces of nature.

INTELLIGENCE is the ability to think quickly and formulate new ideas.

CHARISMA is a character's leadership qualities and "magnetism."

CHARACTER

An individual who takes part in the story set up by the gamemaster. A "player character" is one whose role a player takes on; a "non-player character" is a villain or minor character played by the gamemaster.

CLASS

The character's profession. In this *Sourcebook*, characters are described as "fighters," "magicians," and even "thieves" when appropriate. Some games have rigid rules for character classes, while other systems let characters develop more freely. Use the class descriptions in the entries as guidelines for adapting characters to your own system.

CREATURES

We provide some special statistics for creatures:

ALIGNMENT: A creature is good, evil, or neutral; that's its alignment.

ARMOR CLASS is a measure of how hard it is to damage a creature. It's a rating from 0 (very hard to damage) to 9 (easy).

ATTACKS tells you how many times the creature can attack in one "turn." For example, "3/turn" means the creature can make three attacks.

DAMAGE: Creatures have damage ratings, expressed in terms of dice. When a creature injures an opponent, dice are rolled to determine how many "hits" it inflicts. For example, if a creature's damage rating is 2d6, you roll two six-sided dice; the result is the number of hits its opponent suffers. When a creature has more than one attack, it often has separate damage ratings for each attack (e.g., 10d6/3d6/5d6).

EXPERIENCE VALUE: Some game systems award characters experience (that is, improved skills and abilities) for defeating creatures. If your system does not use experience points, or awards them only for other activities such as roleplaying and clever play, ignore this figure.

MOVE is the number of feet a creature can run in one "turn."

DICE

Roleplaying games use dice to determine the success or failure of characters' actions. Along with the familiar six-sided dice, there are four-, eight-, ten-, twelve-, and twenty-sided dice. These are abbreviated with the letter "d" for die, followed by the die's number of sides: "d4," "d6," "d10," and so on.

Sometimes there is a number before the "d," indicating how many of that kind of die to roll. For instance, if you see "2d6," it means you roll two six-sided dice and add the results. In this *Sourcebook*, almost all rolls are for one or more d6.

GAMEMASTER

The person who "runs," or referees, the adventure. The gamemaster tells the story in which the players pretend to be characters, and decides the outcome of characters' actions.

HITS

Characters can be injured on their adventures. In most roleplaying games, a character can suffer some number of "hits" before falling unconscious or dying. A tough character might have 50 or more hits, and a fragile one less than 10.

LEVEL

A convention used in some games to indicate a character's proficiency in many activities. The higher the number of the character's skill level, the more powerful he or she has become. For example, a "5th-skill-level fighter" is a more dangerous opponent than one of the 4th skill level.

Typically characters begin at the 1st skill level, and progress to higher levels. In *Willow's* world (as a rule of thumb), a skill level from about 5 to 15 indicates significant skill, from 15 to 20 is truly exceptional, and above 20 is world-class power. (Queen Bavmorda, the most powerful magician in the world, has attained the 36th skill level!)

SKILL

An ability a character has acquired by learning, as opposed to inborn attributes. Some roleplaying games allow characters to learn skills like climbing, tracking, fighting, various professions, and so on. Other games assume all these as part of "character classes" that allot these abilities automatically when the character chooses a career.



TURN

One turn is assumed to be equal to ten seconds.

ABILITY CHECKS

Sometimes the gaming notes will tell you to make an "ability check" against one of a character's attributes. To do

so, roll a twenty-sided die (or, if your game doesn't use polyhedral dice, roll 3d6 instead).

If the number rolled is equal to or less than the character's attribute score, the character passed the check. Otherwise, he failed.

Example: A character is the target of a spell. The spell rule says that the target must make a constitution check to resist the spell's effects. The character's constitution score is 13. If his player rolls 13 or less, the character is not affected by the spell; if the roll is 14 or more, the character fails the check, and is affected.



HEROES & VILLAINS

Willow struggles to protect Elora Danan. Madmartigan renews his friendship with Airk Thaughaer, and falls in love with Sorsha. Queen Bavmorda battles Fin Raziel. The story of *Willow* is a story of people—whether humans, Nelwyns, brownies, or something else.

In this section you'll encounter all the people who played a part in *Willow's* adventure, with details of their background, personality, and role in the story.



WILLOW

"A lad of great promise . . . I hope."

—The High Aldwin



Willow was born, a month early and perilously underweight, during a record-breaking thunderstorm. Over long hours his parents struggled to keep him alive. As soon as the rain lightened in the morning, the father, Schnorr Ufgood, rushed for the Aldwin, dragging him out of bed.

Still groggy when he reached Ufgood Reach, the Aldwin accidentally blessed the baby's three-year-old sister and her pet pigeon before Schnorr finally put the infant in the Aldwin's arms. At once the Aldwin awoke fully and said, "I sense that this child has a great talent for magic."

"Magic? Oh, no!" said Schnorr. "What about talent for feeding hogs or thatching the roof?" And Trada, his wife, said, "Talent for surviving this day, what of that?"

"Oh, he will live," said the Aldwin, and gave his blessing to the infant. The story is told in the village that at that moment the rain stopped and the morning sun appeared—and an ancient willow tree on the shore of Ufgood Reach fell into the river Freen.

The omen was extremely hard to interpret, but the parents felt they could not ignore it. So they named the boy Willow.

WILLOW'S CHILDHOOD

Schnorr Ufgood, a gruff, practical man, had no use for magic. He was struggling to feed his family, and waiting impatiently for the day he could pull Willow out of the crib and put him behind a plow. He didn't want to hear about great magic. And so he ignored the Aldwin's words.

But he was a loving father, and Trada a kindhearted though sickly mother. Under their tender care the baby grew into a small but healthy Nelwyn boy. Willow weeded the family garden, picked berries in the forest, and helped around the house. He daydreamed more than Schnorr liked—any daydreaming was more than Schnorr liked. And Willow lacked enthusiasm for farm tasks like cleaning the hog wallow.

When he was six, tragedy struck. Trada succumbed to an epidemic that raced through Nelwyn Valley, leaving the villages devastated. Schnorr and his children toiled on alone at Ufgood Reach. Trying to be both mother and father to them, Schnorr took Willow and his sister, Soreen, to the

festival. Schnorr said many times later on, "I still hope that wasn't the greatest mistake I ever made."

MAGIC

At the festival, Willow watched the tug-of-war, ate seven kinds of candy, and sang in the Wickerman ceremony. He ran and climbed and played. Then, in front of the stage, he stopped in his tracks.

A travelling entertainer, Pesto the Magnificent, was making birds appear from nowhere, pulling scarves from a child's ear, and showering the audience with confetti from his fingertips. Willow had seen the High Aldwin perform magic, but Pesto showed incomparably more showmanship and flair. Willow thought the magician had discovered a new, colorful realm, one he knew he wanted to live in.

So began Willow's lifelong love of magic, stagecraft, and legerdemain. He pestered the village archivist to search the records for old magic tricks. He built double-chambered bottles and tables with trapdoors. He sewed his own cape with a secret pocket, preparing for a marvelous trick that would make an entire young pig disappear!

As Willow grew up, Schnorr tried constantly to teach him good farm sense. "Magic? Aye, you may have your magic, and I will mend the fences and sow crops, and see which of us shall starve!"

Schnorr would never starve, for he worked like a team of horses every day of his life. He slaved over his crops as though pulling food out of the soil with his own hands. He tended every animal like a family member, and drove every family member almost like an animal. Schnorr knew family survival depended on family effort. Perhaps it was exhaustion that caused Schnorr's death at a relatively early age.

WILLOW'S SEARCH FOR MAGIC

Willow's sister, Soreen, married and moved to a distant village shortly before Schnorr's death. Willow faced the



farm alone, much as a haggard sailor, adrift on a raft, faces an approaching hurricane. Had he not found Kiaya and marital happiness, he would have failed.

Though his workload nearly crushed him, Willow still found an hour every week or so to practice stagecraft. He longed to learn real magic as well. Every time he went into the village for supplies, he pestered the High Aldwin to take him on as apprentice. The Aldwin never consented, but never chased Willow away. As the months of pleading turned into years, Willow wondered if the Aldwin was testing his desire to learn.

One evening in early autumn, before the leaves began to turn, Willow visited the Aldwin again. "Willow, sit!" said the Aldwin, indicating a stool. "You know, I hope, that the lore of magic is shrouded in secrecy? That any student must swear terrible oaths never to divulge this lore to the unlearned?"

"Yes, Aldwin," gulped Willow.

"By the way, would you like a snack or drink or anything?"

"No, thank you."

"Forgot my manners. . . . Where was I? Oh, yes, terrible oaths. Well, would you swear to keep your knowledge secret?"

"Yes, Aldwin, yes!"

"I have watched you for years now. If you only had faith in your own ability, you might already be a magician. But I am willing to test that faith, perhaps improve it. I have prepared a scroll with a couple of minor spells for you—"

"Oh, thank you, Aldwin!" Willow shouted, leaping up.

"Sit!" barked the wizard, and Willow sat. "I'm not making you my apprentice—yet. The scroll carries a few little cantrips that may help discipline your spirit. But we shall make locating this scroll an exercise in itself. I have hidden it somewhere, and you must find it."

"Uh—thank you. But where should I look?"

"Willow, is the study of magic important to you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, I have hidden the scroll in the most important place in this village. You have until, oh, this time tomorrow to find it. Now go."

Harvest time was drawing near. Although in a week Willow's family would face more backbreaking work than they could handle, just now they had little to do. Willow set out on the instant to search the village.

He racked his brain trying to decide what places the Aldwin considered important. Council members' homes? Willow knocked on every door and politely asked to look around the house, but he didn't get very far. He didn't think the Aldwin would hide the scroll anywhere that might get Willow chased with a broom for looking.

Perhaps the archives? Willow caught the old archivist, Lardetter, leaving the building for the night. "Any scrolls here?" he asked Lardetter breathlessly.

"About fefty tho'sind," the old Nelwyn croaked. "What d'ye wish?" Lardetter allowed Willow to stay through the night to examine the voluminous Nelwyn records of births, deaths, marriages, family histories, battles, stories, recipes, remedies, and old wives' tales. But though he pawed through dusty shelves and cubbyholes until his eyes burned, Willow found nothing at all about magical spells.

He was ready to trudge home when inspiration struck.

He ran to the edge of the village and approached the Aldwin's hut. Just as he was about to knock, the door opened.

"Oh!" said Willow, surprised. "Aldwin, I was wondering—"

"No, Willow, the scroll isn't hidden here, or anywhere around here," said the Aldwin. "Go home and go to sleep. Your family is worried."

So he did, and so they were. Willow told them of his quest, and though he was hog-tired, as the Nelwyns say, excitement still lifted his voice. "Magic, Kiaya!" he told his wife. "It's somewhere out there, somewhere important, waiting! Just think, I could find it tomorrow, be the High Aldwin's apprentice by next week—"

"Next week is harvest," said Kiaya. "Maybe you could wait until the week after?" They laughed. Kiaya warmed some leftovers from supper over the hearth fire, Willow ate, his son, Ranon, sang him a new song he'd learned, and the family went to bed.

THE TEST'S OUTCOME

Willow rose before dawn the next morning (having slept perhaps an hour), did his few chores quickly, and set out again for the village. As the sun climbed he checked the village market ("Food," he said, "everybody needs food!"), the shores of River Freen ("Water, who could live without water?"), and the various bridges ("We'd never get across to the rest of the world without them!"). As the sun descended he checked the old mill ("Bread is as important as anything I can think of!"), the barracks of Vohnkar and his soldiers, and then, with increasing desperation, the smithy, alleyways, boat docks, and even the village dumping ground. No scroll.

Disheartened, Willow mustered the courage to face the last important place he could think of.

Burglekutt lived as only a village Prefect could afford to live, in a luxurious home facing River Freen. Its property taxes alone would have ruined Willow—but Burglekutt assessed property values and taxes himself. Willow found the Prefect shaking his fruit trees to chase birds away. "What do you want, Ufgood?" Burglekutt sneered. "Come to pay your debts?"

"No, sir. I wondered if you might have seen a—um—"

"A what? Out with it."

"A magical scroll."

Burglekutt peered at him craftily. "Hmmm. Well, perhaps I haven't—but perhaps I have. What would you give for one, should I happen to possess such a valuable item?"

Perspiring from the day's effort, shaky from lack of food, Willow wanted nothing in the world just then but that scroll. "Um, well . . ."

"Would you give a half interest in your farm?"

Willow looked around hopelessly. His eyes fell on a nest in the tree that Burglekutt had been shaking. The birds were returning to it, despite the Prefect's scowl. With disbelief Willow realized he was seriously considering Burglekutt's offer. "No, no, sorry," he said, staggering away.

At sunset Willow stood despondently before the



Aldwin's hut. "No scroll?" said the Aldwin. Disappointment haunted his voice.

"I looked everywhere!"

"You looked everywhere that others consider important. Never did you trust your own judgment of importance. Well, you have failed the test. But I will leave the scroll where it is. If you ever find it, you may still learn from it."

Disconsolate, Willow headed home. Evening brought a gentle breeze from the river, with the crisp scent of autumn leaves. Amid lengthening shadows Willow entered the deserted village square, and his eyes lit on a large wicker statue. "The Wickerman!" he shouted, and ran to it.

THE WICKERMAN



The sculpture, a standing Nelwyn woven of thin wooden shoots, formed the centerpiece of every important village festival. It had been put up in anticipation of the harvest fair.

Though it resembles the wicker structures once used by the druids, the Nelwyn Wickerman is entirely different. Its outstretched arms symbolize the Nelwyn way of peace and generosity. *What place could be more important?* Willow thought, rooting around at the statue's base for the scroll.

Finding nothing, he felt around the legs and torso. "I'm sure it's here!" he said aloud. After a careful look around, he climbed onto the statue, thinking the scroll must rest in one of the hands. Or on the head. Or somewhere.

Near the top, the statue gave a sickening lurch. Willow's weight was throwing it off balance. Afraid even to breathe, he clung to its neck like a child. Gently he leaned inward, bringing the statue upright again.

He looked out around the village to see whether anyone had noticed. In the dying light—a candle-orange sunset framed by glowing pink clouds—Willow saw homes and the archives and the blacksmith's forge, the entire village. Flocks of birds chattered loudly as they sought roost in the forest. River Freen flowed brilliant orange beyond the homes and around Usgood Reach.

Seeing his own home on this beautiful evening, Willow felt his throat tighten with happiness. His children waited there, Mims with her paintings and Ranon practicing magic tricks like his father. And Kiaya would have dinner waiting.

Very suddenly Willow thought, *What am I doing up here?*

With the thought, the wicker neck gave way. "Yaaah!" Willow said as he fell down inside the statue. One of its legs tore open and he spilled out onto the ground, a strange offering on the spot where in a few days villagers would offer garlands and fruit baskets. No one had heard Willow's shout. He looked at the Wickerman, which now sagged to one side like a weary traveller. "I know how you feel," Willow muttered.

He set out for home with a sure pace, feeling more certain with every step. Arriving, he paused in the open doorway. Kiaya and the children greeted him, but he made no reply.

"Did you find the scroll—Willow, what is it?" Kiaya asked. Willow was staring around the hut, at the stage



gadgets and the cots and the wooden bathtub. His gaze ended at the hearth, where a stewpot simmered quietly.

"What?" Kiaya repeated. Willow strode to the hearth-stones and looked down. There was nothing to see. For a moment his faith wavered, but he knew what he felt. He closed his eyes, bent down, and touched . . . parchment.

He opened his eyes. In his hand he held the scroll.

Kiaya and the children gasped. "You found it!"

"Here?"

"It just appeared in your hand! How—?"

"The most important place," Willow whispered.

Over the long winter Willow studied the scroll, absorbing his first knowledge of true magic. Practice brought no clear results. For example, one spell supposedly kept away mosquitoes. But it was winter and all the mosquitoes were gone anyway.

He never told anyone about his escapade with the Wickerman. But at the next town meeting Willow was the first volunteer to help rebuild it.

ELORA'S ARRIVAL

Despite the scroll's lesson, or perhaps because he had failed the test, Willow still felt reluctant to trust his feelings. When Elora Danan drifted into River Freen's shallows by Usgood Reach, Willow feared her as a bad omen. Not trusting his fatherly affection for her, he urged his family to send her raft downstream and forget about her.

Even as he grew to love the child and guarded her on the journey to the crossroads, Willow couldn't stick to his inner convictions. Though he mistrusted Madmartigan, he entrusted Elora to the rogue, and it took Cherlindrea (along with a couple of high-spirited brownies) to bring him back to his duty.

Willow began learning magic and doing wondrous things. At the same time, he befriended Madmartigan and the brownies, then Fin Raziel and finally Sorsha. With their examples to inspire him, and understanding of the urgency of the fight against Bavmorda, Willow grew in confidence. At the final battle in Nockmaar Castle, he found the courage

and resourcefulness to bluff Queen Bavmorda herself, and so defeat her.

Fin Raziel's gift of a genuine book of magic, a rare tome of great power (see *THE BOOK OF MAGIC*), set Willow well on his way to mastery of the arts of wizardry.

GAMING NOTES

1st (later 4th) skill-level magician

Strength: 8	Dexterity: 16
Constitution: 13	Wisdom: 12
Intelligence: 17	Charisma: 8
Hits: 20	

SKILLS

Farming, stagecraft, being a parent. Like all Nelwyns, Willow is better than the human average in moving quietly, hiding, and climbing. He has no weapon skills, but in front of Nockmaar Castle he showed a native gift for military tactics. During his adventures Willow learned horseback riding.

Beginning as a novice in magic, Willow grew quickly in skill because of his native talent and Fin Raziel's expert instruction. By the end, Willow had become a 4th-level mage (or the equivalent in your game system), and knew all the spells of good or neutral nature appropriate to that level. He will undoubtedly rise even further soon.

EQUIPMENT

For Willow's magical possessions, see the entries for ACORNS, *THE BOOK OF MAGIC*, and *CHERLINDREA'S WAND*. During his adventures, Willow carried a papoose to hold Elora, and at the end he was given a fine white pony.

MADMARTIGAN

"Liar? Rogue? Womanizer? Betrayer of trusts? Indeed, Madmartigan has his faults. But gods, what a swordsman!"

—Airk Thaugbaer



The most plentiful and least reliable source of information on Madmartigan's past is, of course, Madmartigan himself. He claims to have visited all the kingdoms, sailed every sea, become a knight of Galladoorn by age twelve, fought in three armies and six troops of mercenaries, guarded merchant caravans, joined a travelling circus, climbed within fifty feet of the summit of unclimbable Mount Chandraloa, climbed within twenty feet, stood on the summit itself, assassinated Count Venarium, rescued Count Venarium from assassination, visited the King of Cashmere's forbidden harem, escaped on horseback from Cashmere with fifty squads of soldiers in hot pursuit, defeated seven men at once (sometimes he says nine or eleven) in unarmed combat, and met seven noblewomen at a dinner party, all of whom he—well, on the subject of women, Madmartigan claims exploits that dwarf his other alleged feats.

The astonishing point is that as much as one quarter of all this may be true.

HIS YOUTH

Madmartigan was born of well-to-do, though not noble, parents, and grew up in Galladoorn's thriving capital. The southern kingdom of Galladoorn, famed for its open borders and willingness to take the refugees of all lands, stood second only to Tir Asleen in wealth and power. In this cosmopolitan area young Madmartigan learned of far-off lands and cultures, heard exotic languages, and saw strange customs. The finest instructors taught him hunting, sailing, archery, and horsemanship.

Around the campfires of nomads' caravans from the East, Madmartigan loved to hear the old camel drivers tell tales. At their stained (and rather smelly) knees he learned how to tell a story with the verve, pace, excitement, and contempt for accuracy that satisfies the listener but makes the historian's job hard.

It is certainly true that he showed his genius for the sword while very young. At ten, when a group of friends were ambushed by Pohas, Madmartigan slew four—or six—or eight Pohas with a sword. At ten, he neither owned a sword, nor had received instruction with one, but when one came to hand in the fracas, he knew instinctively how to use it—and how to inflate accounts of his heroism.

While healers tended the wounds of his friends, Madmartigan demonstrated his swordsmanship, dancing lightly around spectators and tracing elegant patterns with a blade.

All the while, an aged man looked on. He was so frail he could not stand upright, but his eyes gleamed as the boy postured. "Feet farther apart," he cried suddenly.

The boy stopped, and the crowd fell silent. "Stability," croaked the old man. "Feet wide apart. And you are holding the blade like a mallet on the downswing. Treat it as an extension of your forearm."

Madmartigan swung the blade as the elder advised, and found that it rested more easily in his grip. "You seem to know a lot about swords," he said, "for a guy who looks too weak to lift one."

The old man's only reply was, "You quack too much, little bird. But you will be my student. Help me up; we go to your home."

Fascination overcoming common sense (an uneven battle for Madmartigan, even then), the boy led the elder home. As easily as that, Madmartigan became the last and, he says, the greatest disciple of the swordmaster Roniro, the only living specialist in the lost school of *sushin* ("mosquito") swordfighting.

This discipline, developed in the northeastern kingdoms beyond the mountains of Nockmaar, stresses adroit maneuvering, delicate control of the blade tip, and above all, finesse. Because it demands extraordinary ability, the style fell into disuse. With Madmartigan, it was reborn in the West. In the following years, he became essentially unbeatable.

HIS KNIGHTHOOD

Because so many knights of Galladoorn fell in the rebellion against Queen Bavmorda, few can verify Madmartigan's own account of his rise to the high honor of knighthood.

"I must have practiced eight or ten hours a day for the next couple of years," he says. "That old man never let up, and never had a kind word. He made me so mad I worked harder, all the time, just to spite him. So by the time I was twelve, I'd gotten good enough to try out for knighthood."

(Madmartigan always claims age twelve. Scholars doubt this. Questions of strength and endurance aside, knights



also have to meet minimum height requirements.)

"I passed the riding and archery tests, memorized all those oaths, and then I defeated a knight in single combat. You know who it was? My buddy Airk Thaughbaer! Was he mad!

"It was hard, but I made it. The next-older candidate who ever succeeded was seventeen, and that was Airk." (True. Though probably not twelve years old, Madmartigan was certainly the youngest ever to achieve knighthood.)

"Not long after, Roniro fell ill and died. I was with him just before he went, and he finally smiled at me and said, 'You have done well.' First time he ever gave me a compliment! Must have been the strain of it that killed him. But don't get me wrong, I was sorry to see him go. I wore black for a long time.

"I got along all right with the other knights. But they were a pretty stuffy bunch. Polite, but all solemn like Airk. In the tournaments, the older knights would get depressed when I defeated them. So I didn't go to the jousts and the ceremonies. Instead I ran with the caravan drivers or walked in the bazaar. After a while, I fell in love, and then I really avoided the knights."

Madmartigan still sighs over that first love, a sigh of sentiment or regret or disappointment. "She was a beautiful princess from Cashmere." (Possibly. In other accounts Madmartigan claims she was a duke's daughter, an implausibly young widow of a viscount, or the queen's chambermaid.)

"Her name was Carissima." (Kara, Carla, Celia, Solia, Catherine, Gwendolyn, Gladys.) "What a laugh she had, high and gentle. Lovely. Very impetuous and spoiled, but she had real spirit. And a carefree attitude, a belief that life should be enjoyed. There I was, tired out from years of waving a sword; it's what I needed to hear. I fell for her, the way only a lovestruck kid can fall.

"But it broke up after a year or so. Not much to tell about that; not very interesting."

When Madmartigan says something in his life is "not very interesting," there is no surer sign that what he glosses over is phenomenally interesting.

MADMARTIGAN'S FALL

One of the surviving knights of Galladoorn, Garegg Toth, says Madmartigan took the oaths of knighthood more seriously than his recorded accounts allow. "Aye, though he was young, he worked all the harder to cleave to the ideal of honor—as did we all, but perhaps with not so much concern for failure."

The knights of Galladoorn, known across the kingdom for unimpeachable integrity, swore never to betray a secret, never to desert a comrade in need, never to tire in defense of Galladoorn. Their reputation earned them the name "The Shining Legion." The young Madmartigan tried to live by that high standard, much as his friend Airk did. But he lacked Airk's stolidity, and this lack caused disaster.

Madmartigan had an unknown enemy in court—not one of the knights, but a minister, Jareth by name, who

disliked the boy's cocksure manner and envied his great skill. Jareth put Carissima (as we will call her, whatever her actual name) up to a flirtation with Madmartigan. Jareth led her to think she would be testing the knights' reputation for secrecy. He told Carissima to endear herself to Madmartigan, then see what secrets he would betray.

In a sense the minister's scheme went astray, for Carissima not only made the young knight fall in love with her, she in turn fell for Madmartigan. She refused to speak to Jareth of what she may have learned.

But Jareth turned even this to his advantage. He presented to Carissima evidence that Madmartigan had betrayed their love in dalliance with another woman. Whether Jareth had to fabricate this evidence is unknown—but fraud was not beneath him.

Carissima became enraged and stormed off to confront Madmartigan. Jareth had timed his revelation to coincide with a ceremony of great dignity, the annual Knight Proces-sional. In this ritual, the knights of Galladoorn stood before the throne and renewed their oaths of loyalty.

Carissima arrived in the crowded hall just as Madmartigan was renewing his oath. "Let any who would speak ill of my knighthood come forth," he said, expecting to continue unchallenged, as was usual. But Carissima shouted, "I can speak a great deal of ill!" And so, before all the knights, she did.

Garegg Toth, the knight recounting the episode, still averts his eyes in recalling it. "She was impetuous, truly," he says. "When she thought he had thrown her away, destroyed everything they both held dear, she turned and fought like a panther.

"She yelled out everything he had told her in confidence. Not only secrets that proved he'd betrayed his oath, terrible though that was. But also gossip, dreams, ambitions, and—merciful stars!—the things only one lover knows of another. Awful, awful."

But didn't Madmartigan try to reply? Didn't the knights try to remove this disruptive woman from the ceremony? The answer tells much of young Madmartigan, and of the origins of his character as we know it today.

"After the first shock, he stood there," says Garegg. "He looked at her straight on, and a more despairing expression I never saw on any battlefield. Of course the king ordered the knights to remove her, less for Madmartigan's sake than for the audience's—we were as embarrassed as he.

"But Madmartigan said clearly, 'Let her speak.' They were the only words he spoke. After that there was nothing for us to do but sit there and listen. He stood there, head up, with no expression, just swallowing once in a while."

Why did fast-talking Madmartigan not offer an excuse, shout back, or deny everything? "Until after that day, Madmartigan did not speak so quickly," says Garegg. "He had a young man's idea of honor, the kind that can twist to strike you, like a knife in your hand.

"I think he felt that if someone had reason to speak ill of him, he should in honesty hear the accusations. And none would dispute that, though there are more appropriate times for such things. But for the rest, I think, either Madmartigan would not question the word of his beloved, or he thought dignifying her accusations with a reply would bring dishonor on him. As though she had not done this



already! A confused young man, as I say."

Garegg concludes the account. "She finished in tears and ran from the hall. Nobody could say anything. Madmartigan walked from the room by another exit, like a man heading for the scaffold. He never saw her again. And we didn't see much of him, either."

WANDERINGS

In the next months no one in Galladoorn saw Madmartigan for days at a time. He ventured far away on hunting trips, and went tavern-crawling in every nearby village. Every barmaid knew him by name (though the names varied), but he evaded close relationships with any of them. Several times he was heard to shout, "I'll never again trust a woman!" though now he denies this strenuously.

Tales of his reckless and unknightly behavior filtered back. The knights shunned him, all except Airk Thaughbaer. Even Airk's loyalty grew strained when Madmartigan took him on a hunting expedition—then, when it was much too late, informed Airk they were hunting Death Dogs.

When the pack attacked, the two men slew three or four apiece and drove off the rest. But Airk was wounded, although lightly, and when they returned to Castle Galladoorn, he took Madmartigan into a private chamber for discussion. Madmartigan has never divulged what was said there, but he emerged hours later, climbed on the first horse he saw, and rode away from Galladoorn.

At this point Madmartigan's own account launches into a twilight zone where fact and fancy cannot be separated. He tells of travels to Cashmere, the northern wastes, legendary wilderness sites, elven ruins, underground labyrinths, mountain peaks, and the boudoirs of every kingdom's most beautiful women. He claims he captained a mercenary troop, a privateer vessel in the western seas, a caravan, a palace honor guard, and (very briefly) a tribe of Pohas.

He was away from Galladoorn for several years. Assuming the fastest steeds running the most efficient path across the kingdoms, and minimal tenure in such jobs as harem guard and circus acrobat, it is barely conceivable that Madmartigan really could have done most of what he claims. The problem is that he changes his facts with every retelling, casting doubt on the whole itinerary.

During this time, Queen Bavmorda's conquests continued. When her armies massed at Nockmaar's border, the knights of Galladoorn prepared for war. And when her minions and their Death Dogs were spotted heading south, a herald in Castle Galladoorn's highest tower sounded the legendary Summoning Horn: a call for all knights and warriors to rally to its need. Knights across the countryside responded to the call—except Madmartigan.

Airk watched from the battlements for days, hoping to see the great swordsman. But while others came from the farthest reaches of the kingdom, and from the wilderness beyond, and even from distant Cashmere, Airk never heard any speak of Madmartigan. He consulted the court wizard's

scrying stone, but could find no trace of the man anywhere across the kingdoms. It looked hopeless.

Yet Airk never gave up hope in anything. While the armies were forming for the defense of Galladoorn, he rode out to search for his old friend. He thought to find a lead, however old and cold, in one of Madmartigan's favorite taverns near the castle. Concealing his distaste, he entered the dive, approached the bartender . . . and there stood Madmartigan.

"By the gods!" Airk cried. "I've scoured the land for you, and here you stand in the shadow of the castle's tower! Haven't you heard the Summoning Horn?"

"I have," said Madmartigan. It was early, and he stood alone at the bar. He gripped his mug tightly, like the hand of a long-lost brother; many siblings stood empty on the countertop. "I've been trying to decide what to do," he said.

"Decide! You swore an oath to defend Galladoorn! Where's the decision?"

"I broke my oath."

"Oh, so now you have a perfect excuse for cowardice, is that it?"

Madmartigan shot him a look, but just took another swallow.

"All right," Airk continued, "we both know you're not a coward. At least not with a sword in your hand. Well, I'm giving you a chance at the bravest deed any warrior could imagine: Go back to that castle and face your fellow knights."

"They don't want me."

"You're right. But they need you."

Madmartigan made no reply. Discouraged, Airk headed for the entrance. At the doorway, between the darkened tavern and the bright sunshine, he turned. "Breaking your oath doesn't free you from it, Madmartigan. Only the fall of Castle Galladoorn can do that. If that's what you want, Bavmorda may oblige you."

Airk left. At the castle he said nothing of the meeting. He was convinced he'd failed. Not until the legions were overtaken by a swaybacked nag driven at full gallop, and a warrior in a tarnished hauberk pulled even with Airk, did he realize that Madmartigan did not desire Bavmorda to oblige him.

So they rode on. After many days they heard the pounding surf that marked the coast. They rode to Land's End, and disaster.

LAND'S END

The elves (or so legend claims) gave this name to a rocky, forbidding place by the Inland Sea. It is a narrow plain, bounded by a sheer drop to ocean breakers on one side and a sheer cliff rising high on the other. It narrows to a path hardly twenty feet wide at one point; there, a squad could hold off an army.

That is what the outnumbered Galladoorn knights hoped. If they failed to stop the Nockmaar army here, Bavmorda's minions could sweep down onto the broad plains around Galladoorn, then lay siege to the castle. It would mean a terrible defeat.



As everyone knows, this is what happened. But the conventional account places much of the blame on Madmartigan.

Survivors say Madmartigan led a company of infantry on a roundabout path that, he claimed, would bring them behind the exposed Nockmaar army. But the plan went awry, the minions of Nockmaar discovered them, and the infantry was smashed by overwhelming force. Rather than stay to die with his troops, Madmartigan deserted in battle.

The Nockmaar army followed his path, and circled to surround the knights of Galladoorn. Only Airk's capable leadership let any of his army escape alive.

Of course, Madmartigan steadfastly denies deserting. But since there are no surviving witnesses, there is no evidence for his version of the story. Strangely, Madmartigan has never changed his account in the slightest, though he's told his story many times--far from his normal practice. Perhaps it may be that while Madmartigan excels as a liar, he completely fails to convince when he tells the truth.

"The path stretched among some hilly terrain behind the cliff, through a steep gorge with a lot of outcroppings and loose rock. I was riding ahead of the soldiers through this gorge, looked up, and I swear I saw Jareth, this minister in the court at Galladoorn. He was a shifty sort, and we never got along.

"Jareth was farther along the gorge, hiding behind a rock about two thirds of the way up one slope, the side toward Land's End and the sea. I thought I could see a Nockmaar soldier beside him. A Nockmaar helmet, anyway. So, thought I, a trap!

"I told the infantry to wait while I scouted ahead. Jareth hadn't seen us yet, so I dismounted and climbed up the slope. I thought I'd climb above, then jump down and surprise the two of them.

"It almost worked. But then a rock slipped, I fell, and I slid down at them. Not quite the posture I wanted to adopt in my attack, you know?

"Both Jareth and the soldier drew their swords and lunged. I was still on my back, but I parried Jareth and disarmed the soldier. They couldn't get any better footing than I had, and Jareth fell, too. The soldier stayed on his feet; I made quick work of him, but he fell—you guessed it—right on top of me.

"So there I was, flat on my back with a dead guy on me, and here was Jareth back on his feet. He was no slouch with a sword, and I couldn't get any leverage. All I could do was cut him up a little. Then before I could push the soldier off, Jareth, the little weasel, ran up the slope and over the ridge.

"I charged up after him. But like I said, it was uneven terrain, with lots of outcroppings and weaving paths, and I lost him.

"I should have gone back to the company down below. I know that, all right? I have nightmares about it. But Jareth—well, I had a score to settle with Jareth. I should have turned back, and warned my men to avoid the trap. But all I could think about was that weasel . . . I went on.

"I heard a man scream ahead of me, a kind of strangled scream. I ran toward the sound, along a wide, twisting path among tall granite blocks. As I ran, I saw bones on ledges: animal bones, and human, too. And moss draped over the

edges of the blocks—not growing there, placed like decorations.

"The trail ended in a stone grotto about as big as a tavern room. Bones everywhere. Totally silent. And the smell, wheew! At the other end of the grotto there was a big cavern in the rock face. Something was dragging a body inside the cave, pretty fast.

"I only got a glance at the body. It might have been Jareth, but it was so chopped up I couldn't tell. I never saw Jareth after that, so it probably was him.

"At that moment, that very moment, the wind changed. Do you know anyone else who has that kind of luck? Inside the cave I heard a sniff, then a growl like a really large Death Dog. I bolted.

"I don't think I ever ran so fast, before or since. But still I could hear it behind me: two big feet slapping on the stone, and now and then that growl again. I lost track of the twists and turns. It seems like I ran for hours. Then I broke out from the granite blocks; before me was the cliff above Land's End.

"I thought I'd lost the thing, so I stopped and looked. Straight down, a hundred feet below me, the Nockmaar army was attacking Airk and the other knights. I wanted to get down there and help defend, but there was no trail. If I climbed down, I would just be a target for arrow fire, and the battle would probably be over when I reached bottom.

"So I jumped.

"Hey, it was only a hundred feet. I figured I'd land on some Nockmaar troops, and they'd break my fall. Something like that, anyway. I'm sure I had a plan. Whatever people say about me, I wouldn't just leap without thinking. I'm not the kind of guy to do something that crazy.

"Anyway, I jumped off the cliff.

"That's when the cyclops grabbed me."

THE CYCLOPS

At this point nearly all listeners part company with Madmartigan's story. Cyclopes are rarely seen in modern times. Fishermen off the Land's End coast occasionally report seeing a cyclops in the area, but fishermen report seeing all kinds of things everywhere.

Madmartigan claims his cyclops was about ten feet high, reddish-brown in hue, massive, and nearly hairless; walked in a stooped posture; and wore, of all things, a bearskin loincloth. Roughly human in shape, it had thick, bowed legs and grotesquely enlarged knuckles and its fingers had long claws.

The truly outlandish aspect of Madmartigan's story is that he survived. Despite contradictory evidence on other points, all sources agree that a cyclops is a brutal opponent for an entire hunting party. A single fighter, even of Madmartigan's unquestioned supremacy, has no hope of victory.

"This thing held me by the chest in both hands, the way I'd hold a ten-year-old boy. It had blood on its teeth, and breath like I can't even begin to describe. I aged about ten years and three months on the spot, and I almost dropped my sword. If I had, I wouldn't be here now.



"It pulled me back from the cliff edge, then shifted me to one big, knobby hand, while it used the other to claw away my chainmail. Getting the peanut out of the shell, you might say. When I could get my sword arm free, I threw the sword at the only likely target: its near foot.

"This was a pretty heavy sword, did I mention that? The blade drove right through its foot and into the ground. The cyclops let out a howl that must have killed most of the Nockmaar army below [survivors of Land's End do report hearing a loud bellow during the battle, generally attributed to a Nockmaar war horn] and it fell over. Landed like a brick treehouse.

"It turned me loose. This time I didn't stop running until I was sure the thing wasn't following. I climbed a tree and saw a pool of its blood by the cliff, but it was gone. I went back to the pass. By then the Nockmaar army had broken through. The bodies of my infantry company were spread out over both slopes.

"I got a terrible feeling in my stomach, and I ran down the path to the battle site. I arrived just in time to see the knights of Galladoorn retreating into the distance, with the Nockmaar cavalry pursuing at full gallop.

"I never felt so alone in my life."

AFTERMATH

After Land's End, Madmartigan was spurned at Galladoorn. The knights expelled him from the order, in absentia. They were less angry than ashamed of him.

Madmartigan learned of this before he returned to the castle. He changed course and headed for the wilderness, without horse or sword.

He meant to live off the land. But Madmartigan grew hungry, because (as he tells it) Bavmorda's troops had not left much land to live off. It may be that past events left him more demoralized than he now admits, and he simply gave up caring for himself.

Starved, unshaven, and smelly, he came to a small forest clearing along River Freen, near the crossroads. In the tree shadows stood a young woman with honey-blonde hair and a flowing gown of powder blue. She had eyes like the ocean: blue-green, deep—and wet, for she was crying.

Madmartigan says, "I thought, 'Don't get involved.' Just walk by. But it was funny, my feet wouldn't hear this. Next thing I know I'm standing in front of her. So then I had to say something. And I swear, she just fell into my arms. 'Oh sir,' she said, 'I am lonely for a man's embrace. Is there no one who will show me the ways of love?'

"Well, this didn't fool me for a minute, of course. I knew it was some kind of trap. But I decided to, you know, play along until I saw her game. Unfortunately, this led me into a vulnerable situation, and then about a dozen bandits leaped out of the woods. I fought like a panther, and after ten minutes I was driving them off. No, really. But then this lady hit me from behind, and they brought me down by sheer weight of numbers."

After leading a company at Land's End, jumping off a cliff, and battling a supposed cyclops, Madmartigan must



have been surprised that his nemesis turned out to be one troop of bandits. Not willing to risk outright murder, the thugs carried him to the scaffolding at the crossroads. There he would sit in a wooden "crow's cage" without food or water, until he met the fate of the fellow whose skeleton occupied the next cage.

Two days later, the Nelwyns showed up.

Through a monumental stroke of luck, they wanted to turn him loose and give him a baby. "I said that would be fine," he recalls. "I love kids. Of course, at that point I would have said I loved a sheep with anthrax, but I really do like kids."

"The Peck didn't want to do it at first, but when he couldn't get anyone in Airk's army to take her—fat chance!—he had nobody else. I was a good choice, too. I would have made Elora a lovely father, or guardian, or whatever. If I hadn't set her down to answer a call of nature in the forest, that blasted brownie would never have gotten her."

"I tried to stop that brownie and his silly eagle, really I did. You wouldn't believe the trouble I went to . . . well, anyway, he flew away with the baby, way too fast for me to follow. I tell you sincerely, I was heartbroken. But with any tragedy, you have to pick up the pieces and start over."

"Later that day I found an inn. I didn't have any money, but I told this woman—she *said* she was the innkeeper—that I could work for room and board. And I know this will sound strange, but she just threw herself at me. I didn't encourage her. Don't think that."

"Anyway, she dragged me to her room, and I met the Peck again, and then the woman's husband shows up. Husband! First I'd heard of him. As though I would knowingly flirt with a married woman. He became very irritated, and a lot happened after that. But somehow I ended up with the Peck and the baby, not to mention a couple of brownies."

"By now everyone knows what came next. I went through so much with that bunch of characters, I kind of started to like them, and finally I understood how their mission was important. Then when we ran into Airk again, down in that village cellar, I guess I wanted to show the knights I could stick with a cause. That I wouldn't stab a friend in the back."

"Sorsha? Well, I had what you'd call a grudge against princesses, based on my early experience with Celia—I mean Carissima! But the Dust of Broken Heart helped me overcome that. Best thing that ever happened to me. I think I really couldn't live without her. After everything that's happened, I feel like I'm back on the right track."

GAMING NOTES

20th skill-level fighter
(or 3 levels above the best fighter
in your campaign)

Strength: 14	Dexterity: 18
Constitution: 16	Wisdom: 9
Intelligence: 13	Charisma: 17
Hits: 70	

SKILLS

Madmartigan is the finest swordsman your players will meet. Treat any sword as magically accurate (+4 to hit) when he wields it. He is also a skilled archer and horseman. His other skills include climbing (as a thief of his level), acrobatics, stealth, fast-talk, seduction, and, when all of these fail, running.

POSSESSIONS

Sword (usually), armor (varies), occasionally a lucky charm or a gift from his latest female companion.

THE CYCLOPS

Armor Class: 3

Hits: 90

Move: 70'

Attacks: 2 (claws) or 1 (crush)

Damage: 2d6 (claws)/5d6 (crush)

Alignment: Neutral

Experience Value: 2,000

Cyclopes are found in all latitudes, but prefer cooler climates. They are solitary and nomadic creatures. They live solely on raw meat and fish, in large amounts.

Cyclopes are not intelligent and do not use magic. Besides claws and strength, they may sometimes use a club (one attack per turn, 5d6 damage, instead of clawing or crushing).

BAVMORDA

"There has never been a magician to match her. That is the tragedy of our time."

—Fin Raziel



No reliable records from Bavmorda's birth night mention strange animal howls, wizards speaking in tongues, disordered constellations, or other bad premonitions. In recollection, seers have discerned many omens and portents—but a retroactive omen has no use.

Bavmorda's rise to power was not foretold, predestined, or inevitable. Some philosophers find this less comforting than the alternative—that she was an instrument of some malevolent fate. Better that the universe is hostile by design, they say, rather than letting catastrophe fall at random.

Though there was no prophecy of Bavmorda's rise, the prophecy of her downfall turned out to be correct—evidence, for those who worry about such things, that there is a fundamental order in the universe.

THE TESTING OF BAVMORDA

Fin Raziel, usually silent about all matters of magic, has spoken volubly about Bavmorda's strength, both before and after her fall . . . beforehand to alert the unbelieving to peril, and afterward to warn them against future apathy.

Raziel speaks of one of her early meetings with Bavmorda. Raziel was in her late teens and still powerful, having not yet fallen in love (see FIN RAZIEL). Bavmorda was some years younger, though Raziel does not call her a child. "There never was any childhood in her!" Raziel says.

"Prodigy" hardly describes Bavmorda. She had made lights in her crib, and floated before she walked. From the time she learned to talk, she showed no interest in any topic save magic. Comprehending arcane spells at a glance, she earned praise even from Cherlindrea, queen of the fairies. By the time of this meeting it was not clear to either sorceress who was stronger.

They met, by chance, in the castle library at Tir Asleen. In that bright, echoing room, books by the hundreds huddled together in their thick bindings on high shelves, as though sheltering from the cool air. The librarian, looking so dry and dusty that no chill could hurt him, sat behind his desk in a distant corner. There was no one else in the room.

Raziel and Bavmorda greeted one another politely (perhaps the last time they would do so). Bavmorda asked, "Do

you seek another book of magic?" Raziel had just received her spellbook (see THE BOOK OF MAGIC) from Tir Asleen's court magician, her teacher Vulsant. Bavmorda was plainly jesting, but she spoke coyly, as though only she should enjoy the humor.

"No," Raziel replied, deciding not to take offense. "Since there are none on the shelves, I imagine the librarian here has them stacked up as doorstops." They both managed cool smiles, for true books of magic are quite rare. They knew, as everyone knows, that a castle library never holds one.

Then, as no one was near, their talk turned to spellbooks. Mages do not speak of these lightly, and never in the presence of others; but then again, they find few subjects more fascinating. Bavmorda asked, "Do you know where to find the *Malatrium*?"

Raziel's eyes widened. "No. And if I did, I would not speak of it!" She peered at Bavmorda, as though gauging her motives in asking. "You are young," Raziel said at last, "but you should learn not to speak of such evil texts. There is nothing in . . . that book . . . but corruption."

"How do you know? Have you read it?"

"No! We are fortunate, for no one has seen it in centuries."

"It is lost, then."

"Such evil works are never lost. They move of themselves, where no human follows. When a mage of evil nature arises, they appear. When the mage is destroyed, they vanish again. No one can use their spells without becoming corrupt."

"Well," said Bavmorda airily, "I really wasn't interested in using the spells, just curious. I feel I've learned everything I can from the usual sources."

"Heh. You have not seen my book."

"No, though I daresay it holds little I have not found elsewhere—no offense, of course."

The tension between them grew thick enough to snap like a twig. "None taken," said Raziel. "I daresay you are wrong."

"Oh, so? Let us find out. You would not allow me to glance through your book, of course. Shall we say, then—a contest?"

Raziel snorted. "Magic is not for sport."

"Think of it as a test of each other's powers. It would be useful to know our relative abilities in case we come to some future . . . alliance."

That was the moment Raziel began to hate Bavmorda.

Raziel felt her heart pound and hoped her face was not red. Much later, she felt almost the same when she first came to love: nervous excitement, uncertainty whether the object of your emotion shared these feelings, wonder at your ability to feel this strange new passion. "Love and hatred are not so different at their inception, perhaps," she said later.

There in the castle library, she only nodded.

They stood by a tall unglashed window that narrowed from the inside wall to the outside, in the manner of castles. Under the clear sky nobles and servants crossed the courtyard far below. Beyond the battlements the two sorceresses could see the rolling fields of Tir Asleen. Now and then a bird flew overhead.

Bavmorda spied one. "That sparrow," she said. "Can you bring it here?"

Raziel held out a finger, said a word, and whistled. The bird veered from its path and swooped down to perch lightly on the outstretched finger. Petting it, Raziel looked to Bavmorda; at her tight nod, Raziel spoke another word and sent the bird flying off.

"A pretty stunt," said Bavmorda. She saw another bird, a tiny finch, flying nearby. "But I prefer a more direct approach. *Avaggdu, magleb, strock!*" With the incantation she pointed, and the bird disappeared in a flash of light. Something fell, something that glittered in the sunlight. With a gesture, Bavmorda halted it and brought it to the windowsill.

Raziel gasped. There sat a sculpture of the finch in flight, masterfully executed in glass. It lay tilted on one side, beautiful but lifeless, fracturing the sunlight into a rainbow of color on the sill.

"You've killed it," Raziel said, astounded.

Bavmorda spoke another word, and the glass flashed. The finch, living once more, floundered and stood up. It wobbled for a few moments, then flew away in panic. "I did not feel like killing it," Bavmorda said, smiling. "If I had, you would have smelled its burnt feathers from here. Tell me, Raziel, does your spellbook let you do that?"

With a look of horror and realization, Raziel left the library. Bavmorda lingered awhile, then moved to go. She walked past a shelf, and stopped. She had seen that shelf on her way in . . . but she had not seen that large book. Bound in iron, it almost staggered her when she took it down. It was cold to her touch. The pages were thin gold leaf. She turned them, saw the words of magic, and felt fear. Exhilaration. Power.

The librarian did not see Bavmorda depart with the *Malatrium*. She made quick farewells later that day, left the castle, and no one saw her for more than a year. When she returned, she was much different.

THE PATH TO MONARCHY

Whether Bavmorda had already resolved to rule before the evil book found her, or whether it created that desire in her, is unknowable. But in studying the *Malatrium*, her dark ambition grew, unbounded by sanity. The knowledge of magic mastered her even as she mastered it. Coolly, she plotted her route to monarchy.





At that time Prince Mikal Tanthalos, the handsome son of Tir Asleen's rulers, had announced his engagement to Fin Raziel. Bavmorda, knowing that she must either control Tir Asleen or battle it, decided to lure the prince away.

Bavmorda asked the prince on a forest trip. Though he could hardly have found her attractive, he could not refuse a noted sorceress. On the journey she worked slow but effective rituals of obedience. Prince Mikal, spellbound, broke off his engagement to Raziel. Wizards across the kingdoms looked on in stunned surprise, but they would not intervene in what seemed a private matter.

Tir Asleen's air of joyous celebration gave way to demure silence as the royal wedding proceeded with a new bride. "How beauteous the princess, how fluid her movements, how queenly her poise! Now a new star adds luster to Tir Asleen's galaxy. Now a new moon rises to join the sun, our prince, in blissful circadian reign. May the juncture of day's glory and night's quiet beauty herald the dawn of our kingdom's greatest joy."

So wrote Tir Asleen's last (and least) court poet, Durward, of the young Bavmorda. Durward delivered this homily on the occasion of her marriage into the royal family. That the poet's oratory appears forced shows how little the citizens felt like celebrating this marriage.

Bavmorda still seemed polite and courtly to most. When both king and queen perished in an uncanny accident, soon after the birth of Sorsha, few thought the new Queen Bavmorda might have been responsible. Only one fool dared speak such thoughts: the poet Durward, who became the first victim of Bavmorda's reign.

THE TIME OF WHISPERS

The years that followed brought terrors, purges, curfews, secret trials, public executions, ruinous taxation, evacuations, and unceasing war. Torture became routine, death squads roamed the countryside, and unimaginable monsters began to haunt the lakes and orchards of Tir Asleen. Frightened for their lives, citizens came to call it the "Time of Whispers."

Bavmorda ordered astonishing new farming methods: blights ruined the crops. She brought forth new feed for livestock; they sickened and died. She conscripted the youths of her kingdom to wage battles against all its neighbors, but with no apparent strategy or goal beyond sheer destruction.

Wizards recognized, even before the rest of the world, Bavmorda's true nature. With her mind warped by her dark magic, the sorceress-queen wanted to lay waste to all of creation.

Her own kingdom of Tir Asleen proved to be the first step. She cursed Mikal (now King Tanthalos the Ninth) and the city's other inhabitants, trapping them in blocks of quartz. She summoned trolls to guard the city, and for good measure surrounded it with an intricate canyon maze. The city lay desolate for decades, until Willow and his friends rediscovered it.

Desperate, Fin Raziel challenged her to single combat, but lost. Raziel was too powerful to kill, so Bavmorda transformed her and imprisoned her on a lonely isle. (See FIN RAZIEL.)

THE PROPHECY

Having drained Tir Asleen of resources to construct the volcanic fortress of Nockmaar, Bavmorda moved there and continued her reign of horror. She appeared seldom outside the castle walls, so enforcement of her rule fell to her ruthless minions and their Death Dogs.

Inside her fortress Bavmorda commanded many creatures, human and less than human. Among them were her druid priests, who prepared her spells and helped her in difficult rituals (see DRUIDS).

The druids often cast routine clairvoyance spells. These enchantments, conjured in a rune-carved cistern of water deep beneath Nockmaar Castle, let the druids check on Bavmorda's outlying domains.

Through their spells, the druids constantly probed the future, helping Bavmorda anticipate dangers and deal with them before they could materialize. One spell revealed the vision of a baby born with a certain mark on its arm. . . .

The druids looked on aghast, realizing by the mark that this was the child foretold by an ancient prophecy. All magicians knew of the prophecy, which told of a child who would appear in a time of great evil. But no one knew when this would be. The druids found that Elora would appear now, during Bavmorda's reign.

As with all precognitive visions, the ritual showed many possible timelines and circumstances. Only in one could this tiny child become a force powerful enough to destroy Bavmorda. . . .

But one possible future that threatened her rule was enough to drive Bavmorda wild. She would not tolerate the threat. She decided to locate the infant Elora and annihilate the child's spirit through the awful Ritual of Obliteration.

THE BIRTH

She sent forth her servants throughout the lands, to fetch every human woman more than six-months pregnant. The mothers-to-be were imprisoned in the dungeons of Nockmaar Castle. In the appalling conditions many died or miscarried. Bavmorda ordered her daughter, Sorsha, to inspect each newborn child personally, as it was delivered by the enslaved midwife Ethna.

Those without the birthmark did not concern Bavmorda. The mothers were turned out with their children, without food or water, to find their way home as best they could. Ethna, a kindhearted old woman, cringed at their harsh treatment. In her downtrodden spirit grew a hatred of Bavmorda and a resolve to fight her tyranny.

When Elora was born at last, Ethna spirited her away, moments before Bavmorda appeared and ordered the moth-



er killed. The midwife carried the child on a hazardous, random journey across the kingdoms, evading Nockmaar's soldiers and Death Dogs. They finally located and killed her, but not before she set Elora adrift on River Freen.

The child drifted down into Neiwyn Valley, where Ranon and Mims found it and Willow's adventure began. (See **WILLOW**.)

THE RITUAL

Yet General Kael captured Elora for Bavmorda's Ritual of Obliteration, the elaborate ceremony that would destroy Elora's spirit. She came within seconds of completing it, despite her pitched battle with the restored Fin Raziel.

But at the moment that the ritual's final lightning bolt would have struck Elora and consumed her, Willow's clever trick seemed to make the child vanish. Bavmorda, thinking her target had disappeared through powerful sorcery, had nowhere to direct the bolt she had summoned. So she fell victim to it herself, and the prophecy was surprisingly fulfilled. (See **THE RITUAL OF OBLITERATION**.)

BAVMORDA'S ABILITIES

Bavmorda was certainly the most powerful magician of her time. With a single spell she could reshape an army; with the full power of ritual, she molded the lands of entire kingdoms. Virtually nothing in the realm of magic was beyond her.

Other powers in the world rival Bavmorda, but they are bound to limited domains. For instance, Cherlindrea, queen of the fairies, cannot pass beyond the shadows at the edge of her forest. Bavmorda, chief among wizards, combined power with freedom of movement.

GAMING NOTES

36th skill-level magic-user

Strength: 10	Dexterity: 16
Constitution: 18	Wisdom: 17
Intelligence: 18	Charisma: 18
Hits: 75	

SKILLS

Bavmorda knows all spells in your game system, except for those unknown in *Willow's* world (resurrection, etc.; see **MAGIC**). She can cast them with minimal cost to her endurance, repeatedly and with near-perfect accuracy. She also can fight hand to hand, as shown in her final battle with Raziel.

EQUIPMENT

Bavmorda ordinarily carries no magical items or other possessions. However, she is the most powerful individual in all the kingdoms. If she wants something, she gets it.

SORSHA

"My sun, my moon, my starlit sky . . ."

—Madmartigan



Sorsha's earliest memory is of happiness. The circumstances are vague; she remembers only a bearded face bearing an expression of sadness, the warmth of a lap. She believes the memory is of her father; but, if so, it is her only memory of him.

When Bavmorda abandoned Tir Asleen and imprisoned its inhabitants in crystal and in time, she brought her child with her to Nockmaar Castle. Sorsha's memory of happiness is important to her; there have been few enough such moments in her life.

HER FIRST LESSON

On the day Sorsha turned five, Bavmorda gave her a test. The queen sat her child on the floor between a jeweled ceremonial dagger and an orb of pure crystal. "Choose," said Bavmorda.

The child looked at both, stood up unsteadily, and wobbled over to pick up the dagger. "Wrong, wrong, wrong!" shouted Bavmorda, snatching away the weapon. "Glitter and gold are for magpies. For the true magician, purity and power." With a word, she called the crystal globe into her outstretched hand. The sphere glowed brightly. Bavmorda told her frightened daughter, "You must do better to follow my path."

She fastened both dagger and crystal over Sorsha's bed. "Let this be a memento of your first lesson," said the mother.

Knowing the queen's temper, no servant dared befriend the girl. Everywhere in Nockmaar, Sorsha was treated like a princess, nowhere like a friend.

In the giant castle she had just one companion: a mangy kitchen tomcat with one lopping ear, a cat therefore known as Lop. Sorsha hoarded scraps from her meager dinners, fed them to Lop by hand, even crept from her bed at night to visit Lop in the scullery. She guarded her secret from Bavmorda with the fearful zeal of any child hiding something from her parents.

Meanwhile, her tests in magic continued—purifications, chants, meditation, endless exercises—all with the same disappointing results. "You are to be my aide, my successor, the heiress to my power, Sorsha," Bavmorda often said.

"You must do better."

But Sorsha never did better. Affinity for magic is a rare gift, and not always inherited. The girl cried herself to sleep almost every night, and only Lop lent a kind (if drooping) ear to her problems. "I don't know how I'd get by without you, Lop," she told the cat.

She had no idea that at that moment Bavmorda stood over a rune-encrusted cistern deep beneath the castle. The queen saw Sorsha and heard every word she said.

For her next test Sorsha was led to a chamber she had never seen before, one with hot stone floors and a copper dome with exposed blackwood beams. Steam filled the room, lit from below by hidden flames. "I have prepared a wand for you," said Bavmorda pleasantly. "Hold it so, clear your mind, and speak these words." The sorceress-queen told Sorsha the incantation.

Sorsha pointed the wand, spoke the words, and a blinding flash appeared at the wand's end! Smells of ozone and phosphorus filled the air as, with a flare of white sparks, ball lightning leaped from the wand-tip and streaked forward, to explode against the far wall. Sorsha gasped but didn't drop the wand.

"Nothing to fear," said Bavmorda. "Did you enjoy that?"

The girl caught her breath. "Yes!" she said, surprised. At Bavmorda's instruction she threw two more barrages. With the first she stared in fascination, and with the second she giggled.

"Well done," said her mother. "You sharpen your sense of greater forces. Now shut your eyes and try to feel every motion of the air in this chamber. Extend your awareness. See this room in your mind, from every angle, as a magician does."

Sorsha stood quietly, eyes shut. Then she said, "There's something else here. Crawling along the dome wall."

"Good. You will help with pest control in the castle, my dear. I had the servants capture a few rats from the pantry and loose them here. Point the wand and speak the words."

Sorsha could see nothing through the billowing steam. Yet she felt something. . . . With a word she fired a ball of lightning, and in the steam a rat squealed loudly.

"You found it!" cried Bavmorda. "There are more. Try to sense another one."

After long moments Sorsha turned and fired again. Another rat's squeal rose and broke off. She laughed, thinking this must be how magicians feel. Lives in their hands, going on until they speak a word. *I could do anything*



I want, she thought.

Thinking this, she heard a scratching noise near the wall, and fired on the instant. The lightning shot through the steam and she heard a hideous shriek, almost human in its sound. She would hear it in her nightmares for years.

She ran to the sound. There on the floor lay the scorched remains of Lop the cat. Behind Sorsha, Bavmorda said quietly, "You must have no one but me, no path to follow but mine."

A long silent moment. Then Sorsha screamed, "You did this!"

"Not at all. You held the wand. You will learn to do this to anyone, at any time, for any reason or no reason. That is the path of power."

Tears in her eyes, Sorsha raised the wand and pointed it straight at Bavmorda. But the queen murmured a single word, and the wand flew out of her daughter's hand into her own. "That too is good," the queen said in a brittle voice. "You do better. Now return to your bedchamber until the next test."

Sorsha ran to her room, but not for long. When Queen Bavmorda returned to her own chambers later that day, she found the ornamental dagger and crystal sphere from over Sorsha's bed. The dagger had plunged straight through the sphere, shattering it; the weapon itself was bent but not broken. Sorsha never again tried to learn anything of magic. So Bavmorda received her first lesson about Sorsha.

LIBERTY

Nockmaar Castle lies high in the mountain peaks above the headwaters of the river Troon. The land about it is stark and lifeless, blasted by the magic energies summoned and dissipated in such profusion by Queen Bavmorda. Yet only a few leagues away, the mountains turn wild, bone-chillingly cold in winter, bursting with exuberant life in the summer. Sheep flock the lower mountain slopes; clear streams tumble down to the lowlands below.

A permanent military garrison is stationed in the castle; the stables are magnificent, and some of Nockmaar's finest mounts are to be found there. Virtually from the time she could mount a pony, Sorsha took to riding as if she were a daughter of the Eastern tribes.

She loved the feel of the wind on her face. She loved to ride as fast as her mount could carry her. She rode the mountain pastures, taught horses to jump streams, learned the use of the currycomb, and what tidbits titillate a horse's palate.

Bavmorda raged at Sorsha, demanded that she return to her lessons, insisted that she spend less time away from the castle. Sorsha listened, then turned and walked to the stables. Bavmorda fumed, but would not inflict on her daughter the indignities with which she punished others who disappointed her.

As she grew older, Sorsha went on longer and longer trips, sometimes disappearing for days at a time, camping in the wilderness. She taught herself to hunt with a bow, and lived off the land. She rode as far as Carathor, nearly to the boundaries of Nockmaar's conquests, but steered clear of

cities and habitation. She learned to move as silently as deer, and remain unseen when she chose.

When she was fifteen, she entered the courtyard of the garrison's encampment, where soldiers drilled, chanted their oaths of loyalty to the army, and sparred with one another. One by one, the soldiers fell quiet as she walked to the center of the courtyard.

"I would learn to use a sword," she said.

The soldiers stood, eyes averted from their princess. None moved or spoke.

Until one brave lieutenant, Fennel by name, straightened his mustache, cleared his throat, and approached.

"'Tis no fit occupation for a young lass," he said.

Sorsha stared him up and down. "And yet I would learn."

Fennel bobbed his head. "As my princess commands."

GIVE ME A SWORD, AND I'LL WIN THIS WAR FOR YOU

Fennel taught her. They sweated through exercises in the courtyard, hacked stumps to pieces. At first he was formal, distant, reluctant to step too close to her as he taught. But in a passage of arms, there is no room for distance. He became more familiar, posing her with a touch on the arm to show her the proper stance, throwing her to the ground in the heat of a tussle. She suffered bruises when a practice sword struck, and did her best to bruise him back. She never complained, nor did she ever miss a lesson.

Sometimes they rode out together, in the cool air of a mountain summer. Fennel marveled at her skill on horseback, and demanded she teach him in turn. Sorsha laughed, and agreed.

It was months before Bavmorda learned of her daughter's lessons in the garrison encampment; no one dared tell her. She learned of them only by accident, when scrying in a pool of water with her druids. Bavmorda was horrified.

Sorsha thrust and steel rang. Her braided hair was tied back; she panted slightly. Fennel stepped sideways, caught her blade with his, and threw her off her feet. "Don't watch my sword," he told her, "watch my arm. Its motion foretells that of the blade."

A roar sounded from the sky. Soldiers scattered as Bavmorda landed in the courtyard's center, flame billowing about her. "What," said Bavmorda. "Are. You. Doing?"

The courtyard emptied. Fennel turned white and backed rapidly toward the nearest entrance, bowing repeatedly. No one cared to witness Bavmorda's confrontation with her daughter.

"Learning," said Sorsha, "to use a sword."

Bavmorda flung wide her hand, and Sorsha's sword flew across the yard to clang against a wall. Bavmorda drew herself up in rage—and then seemed to reconsider. A long moment passed.

Finally, Bavmorda said, "If you are not to learn magic, you may as well do something useful. Fine, Sorsha. Learn to use a sword. Learn to use all the weapons of war. Learn well;



if you do not fail me in this, perhaps one day you will lead my armies to victory."

Sorsha made no comment. With a clap of thunder, Bavmorda disappeared.

BAVMORDA'S REVENGE

"What is your name, creature?" asked Bavmorda.

Fennel clung to the cold stone flags of the floor, shaking in terror. "Fennel, Highness," he gasped.

"You are my daughter's teacher?"

Fennel broke into a cold sweat. "Yes, Highness."

Bavmorda spoke softly. "Do you . . . care for my daughter, Fennel?"

Fennel dared a glimpse of the queen. How should he respond? The wrong answer could mean death.

"Somewhat, Highness."

Bavmorda stared at him for a long moment.

"How did you come to instruct her?" she hissed.

"She . . . she entered the courtyard, and said she wished to learn to fight."

"And you offered to teach her?"

"She seemed to expect it. I took it as a royal command. I'm sorry if I displeased you. I meant well—"

"Meant well? Meant well?" she screamed, then got a hold of herself. "Listen to me, worm," she hissed. "I do not mean well. I mean to scourge the world of cowards like you." She gestured.

Fennel transformed, at first with screams and later only with indecipherable high-pitched whines, into a giant, sluglike worm, a pallid cylinder of lumpish flesh. The creature writhed on Nockmaar's flags, then rose, passed

through a window, and plunged to the ground below.

Bavmorda smiled in satisfaction. It is bad to bottle up one's anger, she told herself. It is always best to express one's frustration.

A PASSAGE AT ARMS

"I am here to instruct you," said the lieutenant.

"Where is Fennel?" asked Sorsha.

"I am here to instruct you," he repeated, refusing to meet her eyes.

"I . . . see," said Sorsha.

There was no point in demanding an answer from her mother. Fennel might be dead, he might now be stationed at a post far away in the icy northern wastes. Her mother had taken her revenge.

She attacked the lieutenant with a fury. He was forced back by her attack, then began to rally. Weapons clashing, they fought across the courtyard. She felt a hardness within her throat, but she would not cry. She had not cried in many years.

Not a hundred yards away, the creature that had been Fennel tunneled through the mud.

SORSCHA AND THE SEARCH FOR ELORA DANAN

By the time Willow left his village, Sorsha was second only to Kael in the Army of Nockmaar. She led the search for Elora Danan, and learned that the Nelwyns had sheltered the child. At the tavern, she nearly captured the baby, but the rogue swordsman, Madmartigan, took off with the baby on a wagon, along with a Peck. Sorsha's soldiers were unable to capture him.

Later on, though, she captured the Galladoornian. Although he wouldn't reveal the location of Elora or the Peck, her men found the pair anyway.

She found Madmartigan hard to ignore in captivity. Madmartigan is often hard to ignore. She wasn't attracted to him—quite the reverse—but she had to admire his defiance.

When Madmartigan entered her tent and, under the influence of the Dust of Broken Heart, told Sorsha he loved her, she was curiously moved.

But Madmartigan's claim was merely a ruse to cover Willow's theft of the baby—or was it? In a rage, she pursued, and found, the three of them, along with the remnants of the Army of Galladoorn in a villager's bolt hole.

There, Madmartigan took her prisoner, and holding her hostage, escaped once again to flee toward Tir Asleen. In the canyon maze, with Kael hot on their tail, Sorsha broke from Madmartigan's grasp and rejoined her army.

But within, she was in turmoil. She'd seen the bravery and honor of the men of Galladoorn. She knew the conditions under which her own men lived. She had seen, and been sickened by, the results of her mother's wrath. She knew what Bavmorda had in mind for the baby.

WILLOW

And she had looked in Elora Danan's eyes.
Her loyalty was to the land of Nockmaar—but what did that mean? Service to her mother?
Or, she thought, glancing at Kael as he galloped alongside her, service to that monster?
At Tir Asleen, she saw Madmartigan's courage, and his devotion to his friend. She joined him.
She has never regretted her decision.

—*Greg Costikyan*

GAMING NOTES

14th skill-level fighter
(or the same level as your campaign's best fighter)

Strength: 11	Dexterity: 18
Constitution: 14	Wisdom: 10
Intelligence: 13	Charisma: 15
Hits: 50	

SKILLS

Sorsha is a brilliant archer and horsewoman, and skilled with knives and swords. Treat any bow as a magical +2 bow when she uses it, and any sword as +1 to hit. She has some skill with a crossbow. She has no magical knowledge, and refuses to learn any.

EQUIPMENT

Sword, bow, quiver of arrows, chain or light plate armor, dagger. Saddle and tack. Camping supplies as appropriate.

Franjean and Rool

“Do not be afraid. With us as your guide, no harm will come to you.”

—Franjean



Franjean is nine inches tall, and Rool a little shorter. Sometimes the biggest trouble comes in the smallest packages.

Franjean kidnapped Elora Danan from Madmartigan in the fairy forest, while riding his eagle, Canterfree. Pursuing brownie, baby, and bird, Willow and Meegosh fell into the brownies' favorite pit trap.

Rool plundered a supply of love potion, Dust of Broken Heart, from the fairies of Cherlindrea's forest. Franjean and Rool both decided it would be best to leave the forest, escorting Willow, before the fairies learned of the theft.

In the tavern where Willow met “Hilda” (that is, Madmartigan), Rool endeared himself to a tomcat and fell into a beer Stein, all in one smooth move. Again, it proved prudent to exit quickly.

In the Nockmaar base camp, the brownies freed Willow, Madmartigan, and Fin Raziel from their prison. But they also gave Madmartigan a faceful of Dust of Broken Heart. That brought Madmartigan closer to Sorsha, and brought Sorsha's tent down around both of them.

Finally, having played catch-up with the heroes through most of the journey to Tir Asleen, the brownies redeemed themselves. They brought Airk Thaugbaer's army to the castle in time to provide much-needed support to Willow and Madmartigan. At least that's the way the brownies tell it. Airk's troops say the little creatures just hopped a ride.

For Franjean and Rool, this was a slow week.

FRANJEAN

It can't have been more than 200 years ago that Franjean decided to be King of the World. Up to that time, for centuries, he'd been happy tying bootlaces together, rearranging farm tools, wrapping cats with human undergarments, unbaiting baited fishhooks, wrapping cats with human undergarments while the humans were still wearing them, souring wine, sweetening vinegar, breaking eggs . . . the usual daily agenda of brownie deeds.

But for Franjean, the routine began to pall. Humans grew more alert every century. He kept getting into scrapes and escaping only by the narrowest margin.

For instance, when he dropped a live guppy into a wealthy merchant's snuffbox, the wriggling fish stirred up so much snuff that Franjean fell to sneezing and was discovered. In the resulting mess he escaped only by a quick dive into a wineglass and a blinding squirt of burgundy on the rich man's monocle. This sort of thing makes even a brownie stop and think.

Franjean figured royalty would not be prone to such misadventures. Things like that never happened to Cherlindrea, after all. So he gathered his fellow brownies, or "subjects" as he now called them, and declared that he would reign as their king forevermore.

Receiving less than unanimous acclaim, Franjean retired to think about how to win his subjects' loyalty, or at least to stop them from throwing pinecones at him. Without warning, he had an idea.

One day he left the forest; no one knew where he went. No one cared much, though. After many days he returned, dragging a large cloth sack. From it, Franjean brought forth a strange new device. At the end of a stick hung a cord; tied to the cord was a tiny suction cup, taken from a squid tentacle.

Franjean said, "I invented it myself. Watch!" And he swung the stick like a flail. The sucker hit a low branch and stuck. Franjean held tight to the stick, and swung like a

monkey to another branch. "Wheee! This is fun!"

Well, then everybody had to have one. But Franjean wouldn't turn his loose. So the brownies rushed to the seafood market of the nearest fishing village, but found that all the squid had been detentacled. They pursued the matter in other townships, for few creatures are so persistent as a brownie in search of fun. But they found no tentacles, and nothing that could help them make "sucker-swingers."

Returning to the forest, they found Franjean sitting atop a large pile of the suction cups. "I've destroyed the whole world's supply of squid tentacles, except for what I have here," he told the frustrated brownies. "If you want one, you have to declare me king. Gee, this is more fun than I've ever had!" he said, driving home the point by swinging over their heads.

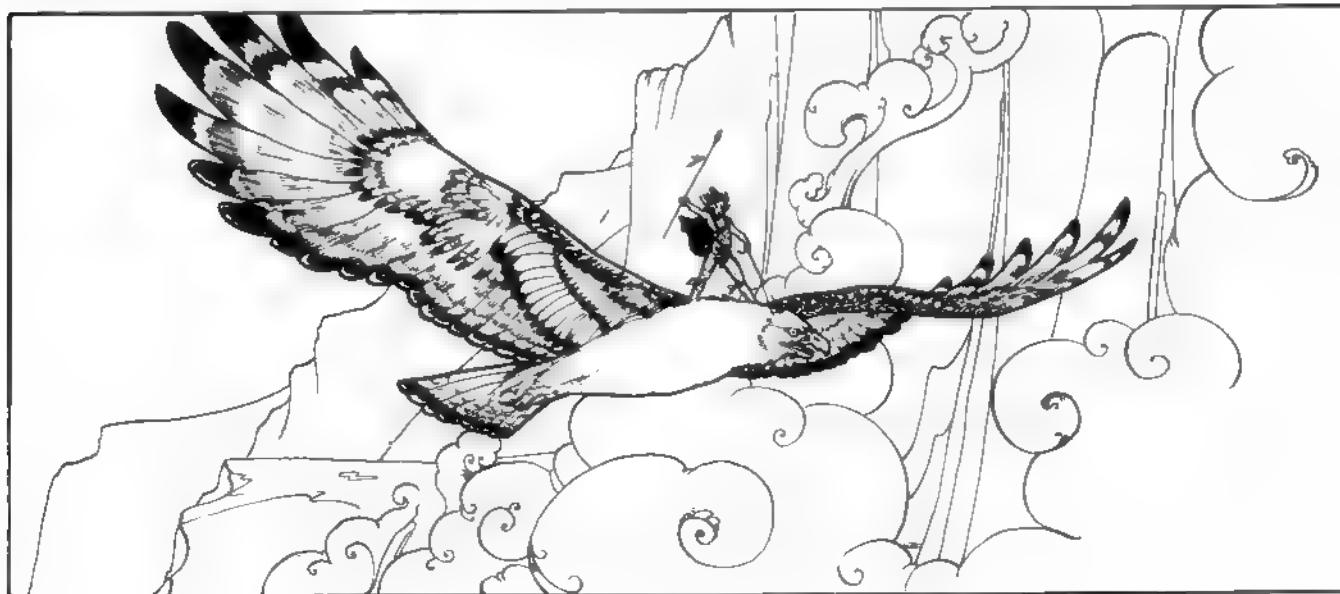
To the brownies, this sounded like a fair deal. They called Franjean their king and swore to obey him. Declaring a jubilee for his ascension to royalty, he passed out the sucker-swingers.

The brownies played with them exhaustively for the next several days, and had a great time. Then they got bored and disposed of the toys. There is no record of the reaction of the poor human being who opened his dresser drawer and found a huge pile of decaying squid tentacle parts.

But Franjean found that his deal didn't hold very long. He should have known the oath of a brownie is meaningless, since he'd broken a few thousand himself.

The brownies ignored him as usual. And there wasn't anything he could do about it, except gripe. He could have learned a valuable lesson: "Office without authority means nothing." But he didn't.

By constantly harping on the subject of his kingship, he instead learned a lesson that works even better among brownies than among other folk: "Nag people long enough and hard enough, and they'll play along just to shut you up."





ROOL

Among the simpleminded brownies, Rool is perhaps the most simpleminded. The brownies tell jokes: "What did Rool do when he saw the sun setting behind the trees?—Sent out a fire alarm." "What happens when you whisper in Rool's ear?—You hear echoes."

But like some humans, the ones who make you wonder how they survived infancy, Rool possesses unusual luck. It has saved him from seemingly certain doom a hundred times over the centuries.

For example, he's fascinated by children. Not because he wants to pull their hair or sprinkle them with bacon grease or kidnap them, like some brownies. He just likes to look at them. And they like him too . . . but Rool always forgets that, and he gets into trouble.

Outside a small hut Rool once met a young human who had just learned to walk. The boy waved his chubby arms enticingly, Rool wandered over to look, the child offered his hand, and Rool shook it. Then, of course, the kid wouldn't let go.

A baby's grip is one of those little miracles that astonish new parents: How can something so small grip so hard? Rool couldn't get loose.

For any other brownie, the next steps would be clear. Pull the child's hair, spit on it, yammer loudly to scare the child. Standard operating procedure for a brownie. But Rool forgot all this.

Instead, using all his cleverness, he froze. He couldn't move or make a sound. Whenever the kid squeezed him, he parted his lips, as though gasping . . . much as a goldfish would do in the same position.

The boy enjoyed experimenting with Rool. He dipped him in the water barrel and watched the bubbles for a couple of minutes. He used him to pound out interesting rhythms on the front steps. He tried to feed him to a horse. Twice.

In his confusion Rool could only wonder at the amazing strength and endurance in the child's fingers. As he debated whether he could survive until the child fell asleep, a stout woman in colorful robes plodded out of the hut. "Alifer! What have you got there?" she said, in the commanding tone favored by mothers and platoon sergeants.

"Wah-gaaaah gloosh!" the child explained. He gave Rool a squeeze, so that his tongue stuck out and his eyes almost followed.

"Where did you get that doll? Let me see," said the mother. She grabbed Rool's feet and tried to pry him out of the child's hands. Rool was still paralyzed, but he was also ticklish. Erupting into sudden guffaws, he startled the woman so badly she backed into a hedge and, in a spray of hair, leaves, and skirts, flipped end for end.

The boy laughed, and in his excitement he clapped his hands—thus releasing Rool. As his last experiment on brownies, the child got to observe Rool's maximum land speed.

That Rool has survived a millennium or more—he, like all the brownies, lost count of the years a long time ago—is testimony to a protective order in the world.

GAMING NOTES

5th skill-level thieves

Strength: 3	Dexterity: 21
Constitution: 18	Wisdom: 3
Intelligence: 10 (Franjean)	Charisma: 6
Intelligence: 5 (Rool)	
Hits: 4	

Because of their small size and nimble movements, any attack on Franjean or Rool is -6 to hit. For more information, see BROWNIES.

SKILLS

Franjean and Rool, like most brownies, can pick locks as well as any experienced human thief. They excel at stealth, concealment, and climbing. Franjean can ride his eagle, and Rool can hang on for dear life.

POSSESSIONS

Spears, about six inches long—they double as lockpicks. Franjean and Rool strike as 5th-level fighters. For damage, see BROWNIES. Rool carries a pouch of Dust of Broken Heart.

FIN RAZIEL

"Bavmorda might have been a stronger magician, but Raziel was at least as strong in courage. And if it weren't for her, we'd still be rooting around in the forest, looking for truffles."

—Madmartigan



Well-omened at birth, beautiful as a child, astoundingly gifted in magic, Raziel became the darling of Tir Asleen.

Her talents appeared in infancy, when formless lights floated over her crib. The parents, minor gentry, called the court magician, Vulsant, to examine her.

The wizard was a bony man stooped with the weight of years (or perhaps of his long beard). He traced patterns in the air over the infant's head. He summoned flames to his fingertips and watched her eyes focus on them. He gave her parents nervous attacks when he took her outside, threw her high in the air, and watched how fast she fell back to his arms.

At last Vulsant pronounced his verdict: "Top quality!" (He came from a family of textile merchants.) Raziel's parents lacked magical ability themselves, but they rejoiced that their daughter was so blessed.

On her first birthday, Tir Asleen's king, Tanthalos the Eighth ("the Great"), said publicly, "In her womanhood, should she wish, she will succeed Vulsant as my court magician." The announcement of this honor drew applause, most heartily from Vulsant himself. "Good to settle that early on," he said. "A stitch in time saves nine."

In childhood, trained by Vulsant, Raziel practiced sympathetic magic. In summer, filling her cupped hands with water, she brought rainstorms for dry crops. In autumn she cast a pinch of dust into the breeze, causing whirlwinds to gather fallen leaves from the estate. Each winter she held up a chip of stag's horn to summon forest deer to feed from her hand.

It is said she rode on the backs of great eagles, who carried her to distant kingdoms and to the unexplored lands beyond, where she learned much from other sorcerers. Given Raziel's abilities, it is almost beside the point to observe that eagles large enough for a child to ride are unknown in our times.

Whatever her method of travel, Raziel was often gone for days at a time. Once they saw that she always returned safely, her parents did not worry overmuch, and she enjoyed a happy family life. This contentment, along with a steady growth in skill, saw her through adolescence. She had long since left sympathetic magic behind, and even surpassed Vulsant's own abilities. But teacher and former disciple remained close, tied, as Vulsant said, by "the unbreakable thread of friendship."

She grew into a lovely young woman with a wide

forehead and chin, and, like most magicians, eyes of uncommon depth and color. Her circle of acquaintances included the court of Tir Asleen, Cherlindrea, many brownies (who, remarkably, never annoyed her), and—distantly—Bavmorda.

LOVE AND RUIN

Raziel knew Prince Mikal of Tir Asleen in childhood. But because he spent his youth travelling the kingdoms, they did not meet again for many years, until they were both nearly twenty.

It was late spring, when crocuses and asphodel bloomed around the castle. Raziel saw Mikal astride a white stallion, his features handsome, his bearing regal, his brilliant red hair shining in the sun. None of her spells had achieved an effect one tenth so wonderful. Were she less wise, she might have wished for a token that could work her magic upon him.

She herself proved to be that talisman, for love enchanted both of them in the same spell. Within a season of their meeting, Prince Mikal Tanthalos, heir to the throne of Tir Asleen, a paragon of royal virtue, respected by the court and beloved of the populace, asked Raziel, "Could I ever be worthy of you?"

From that time of radiant happiness Raziel dates her decline in power. She left her books to gather dust in the castle library. Her charms of spider silk frayed and drifted on the breeze. Amulets of oak and silverleaf and dragonfly wings withered for lack of sunlight or a touch. As more people saw Raziel at festivals, at dinners, or riding with Mikal across the meadows, Cherlindrea and her other instructors saw her less.

Vulsant warned her of the dangers of neglect. "You waste away," he said sternly. "You cannot summon wind enough to turn a leaf, and you create no more fire than a stove. Mighty Fin Raziel changes into a bird or a fish—in her fancy, as any mortal can. My successor, *pfaugh!* Better I had followed my father and sold silk than watched the hope of my kingdom decline."

Fin Raziel heard Vulsant's lecture many times. At first she ignored it, lost in rapture. Later she found Vulsant tiresome, and then irritating. At last she responded, "Old



man, you think I can't match you on my feeblest day? Watch!" With an incantation to call the lightning, she flung out her arm.

At her fingertips a few sparks flared, then guttered. By her expression one might have thought the lightning had come invisibly, and stunned her. Raziel broke into tears. "It's not fair," she said. "I've been so happy. Are spells like sad thoughts, that love drives them away?"

"Spells are like stars, that you must study to learn their patterns. But no more word games. Choose your path. If you turn from magic, I wish you happiness, but I must find another disciple. I cannot think who it would be, except"—Vulsant shuddered—"Bavmorda."

"No!"

"She has become powerful."

"You know what she has become," Raziel said scornfully. "All magicians have sensed it."

"And yet who else?" Vulsant responded. To that Raziel had no good answer. Who indeed?

DESERTION

When Raziel left Vulsant, she found Mikal walking in a castle hallway. Her mood lightened at once. "My love!" she said warmly.

Mikal walked on, ignoring her. "Darling!" she called. "What's the matter?"

The young man looked on her disdainfully. "You are nothing to me. I love Bavmorda."

For a moment, Raziel could hardly speak. Then she understood. "Hold still!" she commanded. She passed her fingers before his eyes, and murmured an incantation, well within even her reduced ability. Prince Mikal's green eyes glowed a sickly yellow. "Charmed!" she cried.

"Yes, charmed," responded a silky voice behind her. "Mikal was charmed to meet me," Bavmorda continued, slinking up to take Mikal's arm. With a snap of her fingers she dispelled the glow of his eyes. "Tell her, Mikal."

"I love Bavmorda. She is the only one I ever loved. I will make her my princess, and she will reign as a great queen."

Horrified, Raziel cried, "How did you do this? Charms are beyond any one person's power!"

Bavmorda smiled. "Beyond your power, you mean?"

Raziel looked at Mikal, who had held her in his arms and offered her his kingdom. Now he looked back at her with a fixed disdainful stare. It would change when Bavmorda told him to change it. Raziel began to realize that nothing was beyond Bavmorda's power.

"You can't sustain this ludicrous illusion," Raziel said, trying to keep desperation from her voice. "People will see. Magicians will detect it."

Bavmorda snapped her fingers again. "Act normally," she said. Suddenly Mikal relaxed. Raziel could see at once that he was back in his own body—her Mikal, the one she loved. "Pleased to see you, Fin Raziel," he said politely, formally. "I believe I'll look in at the kitchen and see what the cook's worked up for supper. May I fetch you something, my love?" He was speaking to Bavmorda.

"Leave now," she answered, as though to a servant. And he did.

"I displayed the charm to you, because I knew you would appreciate it," she told Raziel. "No ordinary folk will detect it. As for the magicians—" She snapped her fingers a third time. One end of a silk thread appeared in her hand, while the other was out of sight down the castle hallway.

"As for the magicians," Bavmorda repeated, "they will not risk much for so minor an incident. Life is too precious." She handed the thread to Raziel. "For instance, your friend Vulsant. The son of cloth merchants, a wizard! He begins to understand how easily the thread of his life may be snapped."

Raziel narrowed her eyes. Suddenly fearful, she followed the silk thread down the hallway. Bavmorda laughed quietly.

Raziel tracked the thread across the floor of the castle ballroom and through more hallways. No one else in the crowded castle noticed the thread, leading Raziel to suspect it was an illusion for her sight alone. The trail led her to the winding stairway to Vulsant's tower. Now Raziel began to run.

She found him in his study, clutching his throat. The line ran to the hem of his wizard's robes, and those robes clutched him in a strangling grip. The old man could not cry out, only thrash his arms frantically.

Raziel pulled at his collar. It writhed beneath her fingers like a snake. Gaining a grip, she loosened it enough to let Vulsant draw a deep gasp. "Sovatha toothok koloro—" he shouted. Raziel recognized the incantation for a powerful dispel effect.

But the robes kept tightening. His fingers and cheeks were turning purple. Then, when it was clear the spell of dismissal had failed and Vulsant would perish, the attack ceased. Raziel and Vulsant tore his robes in their efforts. He fell to the ground.

"Warned me—face-to-face," Vulsant gasped. "Gave me—plenty of time—to defend myself. But—"

They heard Bavmorda's laughter as the thread that had led Raziel to him burst into a line of flame.

BATTLE WITH BAVMORDA

Vulsant resigned his position at the castle. He lived in retirement a short time, but soon died of—apparently—natural causes. Fin Raziel will always believe his death was directly attributable to his failure to defeat Bavmorda.

As Bavmorda had predicted, Raziel found no allies. "Personal matter," said some, while others simply were not strong enough to threaten Bavmorda, any more than Raziel herself.

Most heartbreaking, and infuriating, was Cherlindrea. Raziel begged for her wand, the most powerful weapon she knew. The queen of the fairies rebuffed her, feeling no real concern for the world beyond the trees' edge (see CHERLINDREA). "Bavmorda has not threatened my forest. I daresay she cannot. When—and if—you master your skills once more, when—and if—Bavmorda threatens the whole

realm . . . then you shall have my wand."

Raziel berated her, argued, cursed her, but all without effect. So began a long coolness between them.

Bavmorda married Mikal. Raziel abandoned her search for help, mourned her loss, and returned to the arts of magic. She brought new maturity to her studies, and eventually regained her old skill.

Meanwhile, King Tanthalos the Great and his queen died mysteriously, leaving Bavmorda queen of Tir Asleen; and then began her oppressive reign, known as the Time of Whispers (see *BAVMORDA*). By that time no magician could deny that the witch-queen's excesses were more than a "personal matter." But she had grown too powerful to face.

Raziel alone had the courage to plan for Bavmorda's defeat. Though details remain obscure, it is known she challenged Bavmorda to single combat, probably in the wilderness at the monolith group known as the Standing Stones (see the geography section, *THE WORLD OF WILLOW*). Bavmorda, always confident, agreed to Raziel's terms.

The two magicians had no witnesses. Accounts from villages hundreds of miles away speak of flashes that lit the sky, a pulsating glow, thunderclaps, and explosions. Noises arose that panicked horses, and made every dog and wolf in the vicinity howl as if gone mad. Sulfurous clouds swept across the landscape without dissipating. After several hours the clamor ended suddenly.

And, of course, Raziel lost.

LIFE ON FOUR LEGS

Bavmorda spread the news of her victory across the land. Everyone knew (as the queen told it) that Fin Raziel had been allowed to live at Bavmorda's pleasure. Bavmorda had stranded her on a small island in a lake below Tir Asleen, actually a widening in the course of River Freen. Rocky, uninhabited, fifty paces end to end, the island was said to be guarded with powerful wards.

All of this was more or less true. Bavmorda did not tell anyone her cruellest and most exquisite stroke. She could not have prepared, for a onetime rival renowned for beauty, a more fitting revenge.

Raziel now had a pointy snout, small ears, beady black eyes, a body rounded as a loaf of bread, and a furry tail, as long again as her body. Her four feet each had four clawed toes with a fifth unclawed but opposed, adapted to grasping tree limbs. Her fur was scraggly, bristly, and uncomfortable. She had forty-eight teeth.

Fin Raziel speaks of her captivity on the island only in general terms. It cannot have been easy for the darling of Tir Asleen's court, one of the most powerful mages of her generation, to resign herself to life as a small furry animal, bereft of magic powers. It cannot have been easy to force oneself to eat grubs, weeds, and the eggs of birds; or to watch the stars turn slowly across the sky, knowing Bavmorda's brutality, unable to act.

The years were long, but they taught her wisdom.

She knew, as all wizards know, of the ancient prophecy of a foretold child, one born with a certain mark—and so she knew of Elora's importance and Willow's mission when Willow came to her island.

HER RETURN TO LIFE

Even after Willow rescued Raziel from the island, her troubles only grew. Her size stayed about the same, though, when Willow turned her into a raven. This proved fortunate, since it allowed her to guide Willow and his friends through the canyon maze to Tir Asleen.

Next turned into a goat—Willow couldn't get the transformation spell quite right—Raziel proved invaluable again, when she taught Willow the shelter chant that protected him from Bavmorda's mass transformation. At last, he succeeded in returning her to human form, so she could turn the knights of Galladoorn from pigs to people. Though she lost her second battle with Bavmorda, she proved vital in fulfilling the prophecy of the queen's defeat.

Raziel has adjusted well to old age. She finds pleasure in seeing the younger generation grow to mastery of the magical arts. She furthered that aim when she retrieved her own book of magic from Tir Asleen Castle's library and gave it to Willow. (See *THE BOOK OF MAGIC*.)





GAMING NOTES

30th skill-level magic-user

Strength: 9	Dexterity: 16
Constitution: 15	Wisdom: 18
Intelligence: 18	Charisma: 12
Hits: 50	

SKILLS

Raziel knows all spells of good or neutral intent in your game system (except spells of resurrection, which are unknown in Willow's world). She is familiar with most evil enchantments but cannot (or will not) cast them herself. She is also skilled in survival, lore, history, and instruction.

EQUIPMENT

None.

ANIMAL FORMS

Raziel's intelligence, wisdom, and hits are unchanged in animal form. The other attributes are those of the common animals in your game system. She cannot cast a spell when in animal form.

BAVMORDA'S CHARM

In Willow's world, charm spells are much more difficult than in most fantasy roleplaying games. The enchantment Bavmorda cast on Prince Mikal is an 8th-level spell involving intricate ritual and contact with the victim for hours or days. The victim receives a saving throw versus spells or an intelligence check to throw off the charm's effects.

The charmed victim believes whatever the caster wishes. The victim may easily be made friendly toward the caster. Once cast, the charm is permanent until dispelled. Only a magician more powerful than the caster can do this, so Bavmorda had no worries.

A team of magicians working in close cooperation can also try to dispel the charm. Add together the skill levels of the team, treating them as one magician for this purpose. Then determine the outcome using your system's usual rules for dispelling enchantments. A magician can attempt to dispel the charm only once per month.

K A E L

"Hope, love, friendship, fairness . . . these are fantasies. I choose the reality of cruelty."

—General Kael



In the folklore of Nockmaar the bringer of death is named Ghilasson. Once a human warrior, Ghilasson attained such prowess that he challenged the World Hag to single combat for control of Grulborig, the realm beneath the ground.

The Hag beat him easily, yet, impressed by his ruthless courage, she appointed him to be her herald. Ghilasson gained the strength of ten men, and became the harbinger of doom in battle.

This myth became the foundation for the bloody career of General Kael.

FIRST APPEARANCE

In the folk tale, Ghilasson was born, fully grown, from a cliffside lit by the last rays of the dying sun. No one can ever know the reason until the end of the world. None in his time knew his origin.

Kael enters history's view at age 13, as a lackey of the soldiers in Nockmaar's army. A stolid, quiet, shuffling boy, he viewed battles from the edge of the field. He practiced



with sword and bow, but the soldiers laughed at his attempts: "Put down that weapon, boy, and fetch us drink!"

Kael fetched drinks, cleaned out wineskins and bottles, helped the cook, scrubbed pots, and polished weapons. It was filthy work, but he never complained. Soldiers, on the rare occasions when they noticed him, wondered where he had come from. No one knew his parents (nor did Kael ever tell). The Nockmaar army was still new then, and the boy had helped its minions as long as anyone remembered.

In the myth, Ghilasson stood taller than those about him. His features are not described, except that everyone who looked upon him somehow recognized his otherworldly stature.

Kael was so large for his age, hairy, heavy-browed, and thick across the shoulders and arms and thighs, that the troops half doubted he was quite human. "Some ape in that boy's past!" they said, laughing.

When Ghilasson entered a village shortly after his birth, he knew no words or ways of humanity. Curious villagers tried to speak to him, but concluded he was an idiot. A strong man laid his hands on Ghilasson's arm to lead him to a healer. But Ghilasson pulled away, and struck the man down, and killed him; and afterward none would approach him but an old witch, who taught him the lessons of humankind as she would a son. Then he made his way in the world as a great warrior.

Kael undoubtedly learned this myth, probably from a prisoner or soldier. He found it, as he once said later, "a thin commonplace book that held in it all the lessons I might want in life." And at age 16, he acted on one of those lessons.

He challenged a combat instructor to a wrestling match. Kael was young and inexperienced; the instructor, a veteran who knew all the tricks. The outcome was never in doubt—at least in retrospect. Stunned by Kael's victory, the instructor took him into the regular classes.

The soldiers no longer made fun of Kael.

KAEL'S RISE TO COMMAND

Kael may never have officially joined the Nockmaar army. All we know is that by age 20 he was wearing a uniform and carrying weapons.

He certainly never underwent the brainwashing that the army knew as "basic training." Yet no other soldier in the army so clearly lived and breathed for Nockmaar.

Kael often mentioned one section of the Ghilasson myth as a model of military devotion. The warrior joined a series of armies, at each point vowing to remain with it for life. But in adventures of the kind that plague mythic heroes, each army lost in battle and was destroyed, with Ghilasson the only survivor each time. Yet the myth stresses his sincere and singleminded devotion to each army's cause.

After a time Bavmorda noticed Kael. Perhaps his strength and bearing impressed her, or his fanaticism. Or, as a popular legend has it, she made him a junior officer to scold an ambitious commander . . . the idea being that

Bavmorda could make do with an ape like Kael, and anyone else was expendable.

Whatever the reason, Kael achieved lieutenant's rank. From there, in a stunning display of ability, courage, and treachery toward his superiors, he rose to command.

This too parallels the myth. Ghilasson, serving in an army commanded by an incompetent, challenged his superiors to single combat one by one, rising through the ranks so he could save the troops from further disaster.

Those who study Kael's career remark constantly on his ambition. This is inaccurate. Kael was ambitious to rise in the ranks only so he could devote his talents to larger strategies—marshal greater strength to conquer for Nockmaar—throw himself more fully into its cause.

Finally nothing short of full command of the army proved adequate to his dedication. But the path to generalship included one last, crucial obstacle.

HARKENWELL

He was second to the high commander, a nobleman named Harkenwell. Here Kael's rise stopped, for the commander was as wily as he, and could foresee Kael's every plot. Harkenwell told him straight out, "I know how you want to play it, but forget it. You're a good officer, but I—I have eyes in the back of my head." Those who watched Kael's rise thought that in Harkenwell he had finally met his match.

No doubt Kael thought of the Ghilasson myth. In one adventure, the warrior is sent to defeat the Sleepless Stoneworker, an addled but alert man who guarded a great castle full of statues. He created the statues with his petrifying gaze, using passersby as working material.

In the tale Ghilasson disguised himself, blindfolded his eyes, and pretended blindness. Posing as a minstrel, he serenaded the Stoneworker with songs of the man's reputed beauty. Overcome with curiosity to see his own visage, the Stoneworker looked in the nearest river, and turned himself to stone.

Kael gleaned from this tale the lesson of flattery. He had cause to use it early in Nockmaar's wars of conquest.

The army was subjugating some small village. A band of peasant farmers had holed up with their wives and children in the local blacksmith's forge. Destroying the building would inconvenience Nockmaar's own troops, who needed it to make war materiel. But a routine frontal assault against the impregnable forge would surely fail.

Commander Harkenwell knew Bavmorda's magic could easily take the forge. He weighed its desirability against the stature he would lose by calling in Bavmorda. Nervously, he sent a message asking the Queen's aid.

Kael heard of this. Knowing the sorceress-queen would arrive in hours, and that she would flush out the rebelling peasants, he acted. He took two barrels of tar pitch, used to roof barracks. In each of them he buried a flask of the oil used in making fire arrows.

Then, as Bavmorda's entourage approached, he gave his commands to a squad of minion soldiers. They crept to the forge from its blind side by the chimney. Once there, out of the line of fire from the peasants inside, they set up a ladder,



climbed the chimney, and dumped the tar barrels down into the forge.

Queen Bavmorda arrived just in time to see the peasants fleeing the forge building, as the burning pitch filled it with stinging, noxious smoke. The peasants had fired the forge to keep soldiers from entering via the chimney.

Kael, meanwhile, had already told Commander Harkenwell of the deed. "It would be an honor if you will take credit for this success, sir," he said. The astonished Harkenwell had no time to reply before Bavmorda swept in. "So it appears my help is not needed after all," she said. "Congratulations, Commander. I assume the smoke is your doing?"

Harkenwell had not reached his current position by passing up chances. "I must confess, your highness—I did so order it. The thought struck me too late to recall my previous message to you."

"Well, no harm done," said Bavmorda, watching the minions execute the rebelling peasants. "Clever work, that."

"Your majesty honors me—" Harkenwell began. At just that moment the oil in the tar barrels caught fire. Inside the forge the heat built quickly to intolerable levels. With a titanic explosion the chimney wall collapsed, crushing the equipment inside. The destruction was total.

Bavmorda turned slowly and delivered upon Harkenwell a withering glare. She left without another word. Not long after, Harkenwell was transferred to a lonely outpost in the northern wastes, leaving Kael as supreme commander of the army.

Under Bavmorda Kael consolidated his authority, but he knew well enough that his rise stopped there. Remembering the folly of Ghilasson's challenge to the World Hag, he made no attempt to usurp the Queen's authority. This helps explain his long success as Bavmorda's commander.

KAEL'S DEATH MASK

Not long after taking control of the army, Kael assumed the death mask that so terrorized his enemies. The mask originated, of course, in the myth of Ghilasson.

Early in his putative career, the warrior slew a frost giant by reflecting the bright sun's rays on it with his shield, melting the creature down to a mere skeleton. Ghilasson fashioned an unbreakable helmet from the giant's skull. The monster's spirit possessed the skull and shrieked at Ghilasson's enemies in battle. Thereafter Ghilasson knew no defeat.

The legend worked its magic upon Kael, for he too never failed in battle—until the coming of Elora Danan.

To that point Kael's forces were unbeatable. His armies were hunting down Airk Thaughaer's knights; and Kael himself captured Elora and carried her singlehandedly to Bavmorda at Nockmaar Castle. In the titanic battle inside the castle walls, Kael slew his rival commander, Airk.

Kael could not have been thinking of the final chapter of the Ghilasson myth. In this tale, the World Hag ordered Ghilasson to kidnap the Singer of Daylight, thereby plunging the living world into darkness.

The hero Terambal, greatest swordsman in the mortal world, pursued Ghilasson and fought him for three days,

during which time the sun never rose. The world grew so cold that the frost giant's flesh froze back onto the skull. The giant returned to life, and together with Terambal defeated Ghilasson, trapping him beneath the ground forever.

The parallels with the folk tale are not exact, but in the battle at Nockmaar Castle, Madmartigan was the only swordsman who could hope to rival Kael's skill. In revenge for his friend Airk's death, he slew the general after a pitched swordfight.

KAEL'S ABILITIES

Kael stood large, a throwback to a savage predecessor of humanity. His strength was enormous. Once, to discourage his lieutenants from mutiny or assassination, he lifted a small horse and carried it up a flight of stairs. He wielded sword, axe, and mace with ferocious skill.

More than strength or weaponry, Kael relied on enormous presence. The force of his personality could cow any subordinate, whether staff officers in a conference or line soldiers being roused for battle. His commands went unquestioned. And he knew how to inspire fear in the enemy as well as in his followers.

Also important was his unshakable courage. But he was never foolhardy, and he knew when to retreat.

Kael showed a shrewd grasp of military tactics and insight into the darker reaches of the human character. Most importantly, he was too canny to hope to overthrow Bavmorda. He had no conventional vices; his only weak point was his urge for personal confrontation with his foes.

GAMING NOTES

14th skill-level fighter
(or 2 levels higher than your campaign's best fighter)

Strength: 18	Dexterity: 17
Constitution: 18	Wisdom: 12
Intelligence: 16	Charisma: 17
Hits: 75	

SKILLS

Leadership, strategy, tactics, politics, and intrigue, all in the highest degree. Kael is also a master swordsman (treat any sword as +2 to hit when he wields it), and a fine horseman. He is only an average archer and crossbowman, preferring hand-to-hand combat.

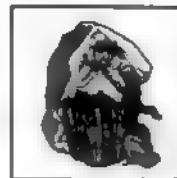
EQUIPMENT

The heaviest sword and armor available, the fastest warhorse, and the best of everything else that a general of an army can command.

ELORA DANAN

"At last sky and earth rejoin."

—Fin Raziel



The birthmark on Elora's arm signifies that she is the child of prophecy, the daughter of the Sun and Moon, future empress of all the kingdoms. Strictly interpreted, this refers to Tir Asleen, Galladoorn, Nockmaar, and Cashmere; and indeed, all these cultures include legends, oracles, and divinations that say a child will appear who can unite and govern them.

Certainly she is no ordinary infant. Elora shows instinctive or magical awareness of character, and can discern both good and evil intent. Willow doubted that Madmartigan was a suitable guardian for her (with reason, given the swordsman's situation), but Elora favored Madmartigan with giggles and laughter. Around Kael and Balmorda, she shrieked. More examples abound.

Though much too young to talk, Elora can communicate with those of great magical power. The High Aldwin of Willow's village lacked enough awareness to hear her, but he clearly sensed her status when he first saw her. In the fairy forest, Elora told Cherlindrea that Willow was her chosen guardian.

There are indications that Elora has other abilities. For instance, the midwife Ethna set her adrift on a makeshift raft on River Freen, and she drifted downstream into Nelwyn Valley and Ufgood Reach. Yet the Freen, though generally benign, has several turbulent rapids above Ufgood Reach; and the raft was a flimsy thing at best.

How could Elora have survived the journey downstream? How did the raft stay together? There are no answers short of magic. One more miracle, and one more mystery.

ELORA'S ROLE

It was foretold that Elora's birth would mean Queen Balmorda's downfall. Though this did in fact happen, the student of history may properly wonder what role the baby herself had to play in that outcome.

After all, she seemed to take no active part, beyond choosing Willow as her guardian. Others gathered around to protect her from Balmorda, and in that sense she gathered the forces that would defeat the queen. But they came together because she was the child of prophecy; one wonders whether that simply made the prophecy self-fulfilling.

Not so, according to Willow Ufgood. "I know my magic trick defeated Balmorda," he says, "or at least confused her so much she defeated herself. And I thought of doing the trick myself, I'm sure. But I don't know...."

"I looked into Elora's eyes, just before the idea came to me. Have you seen those eyes? You can stare into them forever and never reach bottom—if you know what I mean. They're beautiful.

"She looked at me, and I felt like I was part of everything there is. Like I could face the worst of anything and win, if I only had confidence. And she gave me that confidence. I know it. Without her, I never could have done it."

Elora Danan is now safely quartered in Tir Asleen Castle, and no doubt has a great future ahead.

GAMING NOTES

In most gaming situations, Elora Danan has only the abilities (or lack of same) of an ordinary infant. But her power to know a person's character or alignment shows in her reaction to that person.

Player-character mages should not be powerful enough to detect Elora Danan's communication. But a spell of magical detection reveals she has great latent powers. Non-player characters may converse with Elora at the game-master's discretion.

AIRK THAUGHBAER

"No words can describe the havoc he has wrought. I hope to kill him with my own hands."

—General Kael



Two days after their victory at Land's End, the legions of Nockmaar gathered around Castle Galladoorn, bringing thunderclouds with them. Only the day before, those clouds had escorted a stinking fog; it moved toward the castle and fell over the battlements with unnatural purpose, while guards watched helplessly.

The mist, yellow-green like swamp gas, seeped into pantries and larders, and cooks fled coughing. Wherever the gas touched food and drink, they spoiled. Within moments, a month's siege preparations were wiped out.

"Bavmorda," said Galladoorn's leaders. Looking hopefully at one another, they asked, "We cannot outlast a siege now. How can we stand against sorcery?"

But they answered their own question. "We must; we are of Galladoorn."

Proud words, repeated many times as the minions of Nockmaar gathered by the thousands—12,000, to be precise. Perhaps by repetition the knights hoped to bolster their own courage. It worked. When their preparations were completed, the drawbridge fell, the Summoning Horn in the high tower sounded the call to victory, and 6,000 men of Galladoorn charged at full gallop.

Though badly outnumbered, they had fighting spirit in their hearts—none more so than Airk Thaughbaer, commander of a battle of knights with their pages and landsmen. Young for a leader, he had earned the knights' respect for his intelligence, confidence, and impeccable conduct. His soldiers would follow him into a dragon's mouth.

THE FALL OF GALLADOORN

Among the first across the moat, Airk's men quickly broke right as the plan dictated. They raced across the uneven meadows surrounding the castle, hoping to outflank the enemy. The rest of Galladoorn's forces spread out behind in a short reinforced line.

The strategist's axiom says, "No plan survives contact with the enemy." The Galladoornian plan, though sound in theory, fell to bad luck. Heavy rain broke, slowing the knights, and General Kael's cavalry sprinted to cut off Airk's flanking charge.

Now the Galladoornians, rather than surrounding the

enemy, found themselves almost surrounded. From the tower, the Summoning Horn sounded the call to retreat. But the moat was at their back. Nockmaar minions began to cut the defenders to pieces.

Airk assembled his forces around his standard. "Courage! To me!" he shouted, though he saw the tide of battle overwhelming his men. From his warhorse he slashed at the enemy on every side, determined never to let the standard fall.

Then, while other battles of men perished and the Army of Nockmaar stormed into the castle, the Summoning Horn sounded its last and most desperate call: "final retreat." *All is lost!* says the call, the most dreadful sound a knight can hear. *Retreat, abandon hope, save yourselves!* Airk heard the call. And as he always had, he obeyed.

After a reign of centuries, indomitable Castle Galladoorn fell that day. But favors of the war gods descend to both sides. The rain that doomed the army's plan bought life for a few.

The castle's moat was fed by an aqueduct running from a nearby stream. It kept the waters fresh, so the castle's inhabitants could use the moat for drinking, washing, and bathing. The stone channel was covered with earth, and green grass grew to hide its presence.

But the hard rain and the hooves of warhorses battered a stretch of tunnel until it collapsed. Horses and riders fell into the new moat, and for a moment there was confusion.

One of the knights who survived the battle, Wulf Tyroch, describes what happened next. "Airk saw the pipe collapse, leaving a narrow gap in the enemy line. He had perhaps two seconds to take advantage of it.

"He didn't hesitate. He whipped his horse forward, practically dragging the standard bearer beside him. He shouted for us to follow, and we drove through the gap along the path of the aqueduct. Half the enemy couldn't get to us without falling into the pipe or going around. We broke through.

"Airk threw whatever archers were left to the rear and told them to aim for the horses. The rest of us ran as if Bavmorda herself were chasing us. But we never lost sight of the banner."

Of Airk's 2,000 men, less than half survived the rout. Exhausted, they marched many miles, finally resting in a patch of woods. After setting watches and tending the wounded, Airk sent out scouts.

The news they brought back was devastating. Nockmaar minions were razing Castle Galladoorn (the fury that news

inspired!). No other knights had survived. Airk was ranking officer, a general by battlefield succession, commanding a beaten, demoralized, ill-supplied, and outnumbered mob of knights.

He stood in a forest clearing, looking around at them. They lay like dead men, or sagged where they sat like bags of flour. Airk showed no weakness. Holding the standard aloft, he spoke.

He talked for a long time, about hope. The hope he held as a boy that he would someday become a knight, and the hope that as a knight, he would prove worthy. The hope that he felt in his first battlefield command, at Land's End. All the time, he held the heavy wooden pole of the standard, without trembling or tiring. The knights listened, and felt with him their ancient loyalties.

"We have seen our comrades struck down, our nation occupied, our castle fallen. Yet we are trained never to despair; and still, I hope. Victory is distant; Nockmaar's fall seems beyond all strength. Yet as long as we fight, as long as we face our fate with weapons drawn and heads held high, there still is hope. We, we few, we last of Galladoorn—with us rides the whole world's hope."

There in the woods, the knights—the only important army still fighting the overwhelming forces of Nockmaar—hailed Airk, and acclaimed him their sole commander.

"FIGHTING OFF SUNSET"

This phrase was used to describe the seeming futility of Airk's struggle. Scholars agree that without the magic of Fin Raziel and Elora Danan, his cause would have been lost.

Nockmaar outmatched him in strength and materiel. General Kael's mastery of tactics probably equaled, if it did not surpass, Airk's own. The intense training of Nockmaar's soldiers was an advantage to match the morale of the knights of Galladoorn. And of course, there was Balmorda.

Airk's narrow advantage was mobility, and that he possessed only because of his army's small size. But he exploited it ceaselessly, evading or outrunning Nockmaar forces time and time again.

Airk's ability to hold the army together through unimaginable hardship has aroused admiration from the most staid historians. Yet the presumed outcome of this struggle was never in doubt on either side. Though small enough to move quickly, the army was too large to hide effectively. General Kael could not always catch them, but he could follow them at will.

Airk met Willow and Madmartigan, then in a crow's cage, at the crossroads, where Willow tried to give Airk the baby. Madmartigan told Airk, "Give me your sword and I'll win this war for you," but Airk only laughed. Shortly after, he was twice defeated, and his army reduced to a couple of hundred fighters. Knights of Galladoorn do not give in to despair; but by the time the survivors reached a small village near Nockmaar, Airk expected imminent defeat.

Then, in the cellars beneath those village huts, Airk met Willow again, and the child, and his onetime friend





Madmartigan. They talked of a prophecy that would overthrow Balmorda, a tale so implausible that Airk, even in desperation, could not bring himself to believe in it.

When Willow and his friends left for Tir Asleen, Airk showed no interest in supporting their outlandish mission. But then the villagers helped Airk's troops defeat the remaining Nockmaar soldiers—and Airk met the village witch.

WITCH'S PROPHECIES

Standing over the fallen Nockmaar soldiers, Airk looked down the village street to the west. He fancied he could still see the clouds of snow Madmartigan's horse had kicked up as he headed toward Tir Asleen. Foolish idea!

But he thought, *Is it more foolish to stay here and die?*

He had a responsibility to his men, what was left of them, and to the spirit of Galladoorn. Whatever his own feelings, he would not squander warriors' lives on the word of Madmartigan, or the cry of a baby.

Seeking a horse, he almost ran into an old woman carrying a bone. Small woman, large bone . . . the thigh-bone of a horse, it looked like, carved with tiny spiraling lines of runic characters. There were more spirals of astrological symbols on the woman's loose robes, cheap linen that may have been more wrinkled than the skin it concealed. "You are Airrrrk?" she croaked.

Airk jumped back, reflexively whispering a ward he'd learned as a child. A witch!

"Ah—uh, yes. I am Airk Thaughbaer," he replied. He saw that the witch must once have been attractive. She carried herself with the poise of a duchess, though her movements were slowed with age, and her fingers trembled. Much beauty remained in the witch's eyes: brilliant blue eyes, sprayed with gold flecks. He found himself staring. . . .

"Yes, gaze into my eyes," the witch said, widening them, "as I look into yours. The eyes, the mantelpiece of the spirit—"

"Muh-mantelpiece?"

"—where your most cherished beliefs are displayed, lit by the heart's fire. Like that? I made it up myself. Deep, look deeper! Yesss. Bravery, honor, commitment, but I see humor too, and compassion. You were a bottle-fed baby, no? Now you wrestle with your true feelings, pinning them. Two falls in two. Out!"

Airk snapped awake. He had fought great armies and seen his horse shot from under him, but this shriveled woman filled him with the greatest unease he'd ever known. "I have to go," he said, brushing past the witch.

"Halt!" she cried, and he did. He, a general! She said, "The air here shimmers in the wake of powerful magic. The child Elora, is it not? She needs you, Airk. Your friends need you. Follow your true feelings, Airk. Follow them to Tir Asleen."

He gasped. "How did you know they were going to Tir Asleen?" he asked, then immediately regretted it. Stupid, he thought, you never get a straight answer from a witch.

The witch shrugged. "A brownie told me," she said. Her robes wriggled, and Franjean and Rool sprang from a pocket.

"Yeah, it was me!" said Franjean. "We had to walk about a hundred miles to catch up with you stupid Daikinis—"

"Stupid!" said Rool.

"—and then when we arrived, this wise lady was the only one smart enough to listen to us!"

"Very smart!" said Rool.

"So listen to her! Get going! And this time, we ride!" said Franjean. Rool cackled.

Airk looked into the old woman's eyes. He didn't know about mantelpieces, but he saw sanity and compassion there. He turned in the direction of Tir Asleen, and thought he could still see clouds of snow. Not too late.

"What will I find, madam, if I follow Madmartigan?" he asked the witch.

"Prophecy is hard. I hope you find victory. Or at least peace of mind."

"Peace," he repeated, almost in a whisper. Then, "Thank you. All right, brownies, come with me. Captains!" he shouted, striding for his horse.

In moments the knights of Galladoorn were gone. The witch stared after them. "Prophecy is hard," she repeated. "Sometimes too hard to bear." And she began to weep.

AIRK'S FINAL BATTLE

Following the trail of Kael's minions, Airk and the knights of Galladoorn found their way through the canyon maze to Tir Asleen, where they rescued Willow and his friends. It is good that Airk's knights would follow him into a dragon's mouth, for at the castle they almost had to! But after the Eborsisk died, they pursued Kael to Nockmaar Castle.

Airk had little faith in Willow's plan to get into the castle. But as always, he kept up a brave front. When the plan worked and the drawbridge fell, Airk helped lead the charge into Nockmaar Castle. He fought mightily, as well as he ever had. His leadership inspired the knights, and their victory is as much to his credit as to anyone's.

General Kael, at least, seems to have thought so. Kael spotted Airk in battle and singlemindedly headed for his rival. By the fortunes of war, they met alone, in single combat.

Even among the knights of Galladoorn, Airk was renowned for his skill with the sword. Aside from Madmartigan, none in their ranks could rival him. But General Kael was fully Airk's equal in skill. After a pitched swordfight, Kael defeated his rival with an underhanded blow.

In the furor of battle, only Madmartigan heard Airk's last remarks. According to Madmartigan, Airk said, "Win this war for me"—and gave Madmartigan his sword.

When Madmartigan defeated General Kael and avenged Airk, the act healed a long breach between the two. Madmartigan regained his standing among the knights of Galladoorn, and now tries to carry on the honorable standard that Airk bore so well.



GAMING NOTES

15th skill-level knight (fighter)
(or one level higher than the best fighter in your game)

Strength: 17	Dexterity: 15
Constitution: 16	Wisdom: 11
Intelligence: 13	Charisma: 17
Hits: 68	

SKILLS

Swordsmanship, archery, riding—the skills of a knight. Leadership, tactics, persuasion, oratory—the skills of a commander.

POSSESSIONS

Sword, shield, armor, horse, and whatever other equipment he needs. He commands an army, after all, and even though it is poorly equipped, rank has its privileges.

CHERLINDREA

"Uh-oh."

—Franjean



Some scholars propose that Cherlindrea is a "high fey," or elemental, embodying the collective life spirit of her forest. Indeed, she displays near-total control within a limited scope, a combination seen principally among the elementals.

These incarnations of wind, soil, flame, and the sea shy away from human contact. Small specimens appear spontaneously along shorelines, on the edges of volcanoes, in waterspouts, wherever two or more realms abut one another. They frolic, merge and separate, and reshape the elements at will. Usually these youngsters vanish as suddenly as they were born. Larger ones are said to control the weather, but this has not been verified.

The elementals show little evidence of intelligence. They do not speak, and their efforts to protect their realms appear instinctive. So the parallels with Cherlindrea are inexact. But her power and, almost as important, her indifference to humanity, point to elemental origins.

Some, hearing Willow and Meegosh's tale of the fairy queen's kindness, argue against this supposed indifference. After all, the argument goes, why would she create a wand for Fin Raziel to use against Bavmorda, if she were not concerned about defeating Nockmaar?

But the evidence says otherwise. Even folklore recognizes Cherlindrea's aloofness. A tavern song from Galladoorn says it well (albeit with a certain disregard for rhyme):

*Leaves in her hair, shade in her eyes,
The lally [lovely] Maiden of the Forest, oh
She lives free from care, though every man dies,
The lally Maiden of the Forest
'Neath her light-dappled branches I'd find
Love that's pure as the rain and the wind,
But she's colder than ice to mankind.
Oh, I love the lally Maiden of the Forest!*

Wounded soldiers have accidentally passed through the fairy forest . . . unmolested, but unhealed. Children from nearby villages venture in, and return terribly frightened, speaking of traps and "an awful lady who glowed like fireflies." Some wizards enter peacefully, hoping to learn from her, and emerge bristling with brownie arrows. Most significantly, the ancient druids, nature worshipers, wanted nothing to do with her.

How, then, to explain her warm reception for the Nelwyns, her gift of the wand, and the rest?

THE HEART OF THE OAK

One topic that excites much speculation is, "Could Bavmorda have defeated Cherlindrea?" The question, now moot, is probably unanswerable anyway. Note, though, that

Bavmorda never once tried to attack the fairy forest, even when her minions ranged all around it.

But the strongest fortress may topple when the surrounding lands fall to the enemy. Sages believe that Bavmorda could have conquered the rest of the world, then concentrated her might against the borders of the fairy forest. Wearing it away, a tree at a time, Bavmorda could perhaps have shrunk Cherlindrea's domain, and her power, to measurable dimensions. Then Bavmorda could overwhelm her, and darkness would fall in the land of the *sayara*.

Cherlindrea thinks little of or about humans, but Bavmorda was an exception. The queen of the fairies could see the threat from the queen of Nockmaar. The high fey considered luring Bavmorda to her forest and challenging her to magicians' combat. But this would have endangered her beloved forest.

Far better to give humans and Nelwyns her wand and let them do the job. She would even entrust the wand to the sorceress Fin Raziel, despite their cool relations in the past. Raziel had requested the wand to aid her in combat with Bavmorda, many years ago. At the time, Cherlindrea believed Bavmorda was no threat to the forest, and refused Raziel's request. Times change.

The guiding principle in reconstructing the fairy queen's thoughts must be her lack of concern for anything beyond the forest's edge. Not for nothing has Fin Raziel written, "In the queen of trees beats a heart of oak, strong, aged and ageless, pulsating with the rhythms of the earth. In her perception the lives of humanity fly unattended, like summer nights."

But this portrait overlooks Cherlindrea's respect and affection for Elora Danan. The fairy queen gets along with babies better than with other humans. In infancy human beings resemble fairies as closely as they ever will.

Because Elora was not only a baby, but magical as well, Cherlindrea felt disposed to trust her advice. The high fey entrusted child and wand to Willow, with best wishes. But

she may have felt a touch of melancholy, knowing that Elora must eventually grow up and become more typically human. Whether they will still live in friendship, who can say?

GAMING NOTES

Cherlindrea is supreme within her forest, to the shadows at forest's edge, as high as the treetops, and as deep as the roots reach. The fairy forest is actually an area within a larger, nonmagical forest; the exact dimensions of Cherlindrea's realm are unknown. The gamemaster should adapt its size to the needs of the story.

Statistics and abilities for Cherlindrea are irrelevant. Within the forest Cherlindrea can cast almost any magical effect as often as necessary. However, she cannot resurrect dead characters.

Her skill is essentially perfect, though characters receive saving throws as usual against attack spells. She will not attack unless a character threatens a fairy, brownie, or any denizen of her realm (including animals). She cannot be attacked except by the most powerful magic. Even if "killed," she will eventually reform from the life spirits of the forest.

Outside the forest Cherlindrea has no influence at all, and little or no curiosity. Of course, she never leaves the forest.

The gamemaster should regard Cherlindrea not as an adversary for the player characters, but as a plot device. She may heal, or bestow items on them, send them on quests, or provide information (often of questionable accuracy). But she will not aid characters unless she is persuaded that it will help her own interests, which center exclusively on the forest.

THE HIGH ALDWIN

"Meddling old coot—ah, I mean, good to see you this morning, sir!"

—Burglekutt



The office of Aldwin is sometimes ceremonial, but most Aldwins become the informal leaders of their villages. In Willow's village the High Aldwin exerts major influence. And as

High Aldwin, he leads the lesser Aldwins of all the villages in Nelwyn Valley. The exact nature of his duties is unknown, for Aldwins, like all magicians, are secretive.

The Aldwin hasn't let his (considerable) power corrupt



him. He loves his people. He knows an Aldwin's functions: pray for good weather, abundant harvests, and rich mineral lodes. Stave off premature death and physical catastrophe. Consult the bones to find omens of the future.

But—and here is his wisdom—he also knows an Aldwin's true purpose: see that the villagers are content. Instruct them in ways to treat each other. Appear or torment consciences as need be. Remind them that a higher power likes to see them behave.

When the whole village wanted to abandon Elora, and Willow stood alone against them, the High Aldwin could see the young farmer's love for the Daikini child. The Aldwin knew that leaving the child to die would be cruel. So when the bones proved unhelpful, he followed his own heart—and Willow's.

THE OFFICE OF HIGH ALDWIN

Nelwyn villagers elect their councilmen, and the councilmen appoint the Prefect (see *BURGLEKUTT*). But nobody elects the Aldwin. The office is old beyond memory, and each Aldwin appoints his or her own successor. All Aldwins in Nelwyn Valley help in the selection of the High Aldwin, but how they do so is a closely guarded secret.

An Aldwin customarily selects an apprentice from among the young men and women of the village. The apprentice can be from any social rank, but usually shows some aptitude for magic. When an Aldwin retires or dies, the apprentice becomes the new Aldwin. If there is no apprentice, a neighboring Aldwin appoints a replacement—often his own apprentice, an "out-of-towner" to the villagers.

Almost always, villagers speedily accept the new Aldwin. Nelwyns are superstitious, believe the Aldwin controls great forces, and would not wish to incur his displeasure.

An apprentice Aldwin (sometimes called "Low" or "Lesser" Aldwin) keeps his or her own name. On succeeding to the high office, however, the apprentice abandons his former name and is addressed only as "Aldwin." Upon death, his birth name returns to him, so he may be registered in the voluminous Nelwyn archives.

ALDWINS PAST AND PRESENT

Willow's village is fortunate indeed to have such a wise counselor. The current High Aldwin's predecessor, whose birth name was Lugumph, terrorized the village with constant pronouncements of doom: drought, famine, the playing out of the mines, attacks from Daikinis, moral collapse, and infestations of ticks. He absolutely wore everybody out.

Lugumph made a nasty Aldwin, and his apprentice looked nastier yet. That was Glog, a bulky pig-eyed oaf, son of the village drunkard. Glog endured the Aldwin's beatings





day to day, taking out his anger by beating local children. His favorite victim was a stout Nelwyn teenager named Junn.

At Midsummer Festival one year, the High Aldwin made the whole village nervous by calling for war against the nearby village of Lilton. "Heretics!" he cried. "They clear the forests for their fields. They conspire to burn the trees around us, then seize our lands for their own use!"

Lugumph railed unceasingly against Lilton. If he could only promote a war, the Aldwin would become the unrivaled leader in the village, and go on to conquer the valley.

His problem was that Nelwyns are by nature peaceful. Both his own villagers and Lilton's were about as blood-thirsty as two rows of turnips. He needed an atrocity to foment battle rage. So one crisp autumn night during the Leaf-Turning Festival, Lugumph gave Glog, the apprentice, a secret mission.

"Take this wand," said the Aldwin, giving Glog an ordinary-looking piece of blackroot. This root worked something like the acorns that Willow used to turn his enemies into stone, except that the wand turned its victims into blackroot fungus. "While I am at the feast, go to the Wickerman and use the wand to transform it. And—mind you!—leave the wand at the scene!"

The Wickerman, symbol of the Nelwyns' pastoral life, ruled the villagers' hearts. Showing the magical device as a clue, Lugumph would tell them that Lilton's Aldwin used his magic to desecrate the statue. This awful offense would provoke the Council to declare war within hours.

In night's blackest hour Glog stole through the village to the Wickerman. Every hut sat empty, for the Nelwyns (including the Aldwin) were gorging themselves at the Leaf-Turning Feast. As the hulking apprentice pointed the wand and began his chant, he smiled. The only witnesses would be crickets and night owls.

—And one more. Junn had reluctantly left the feast because he wanted to lose weight. When he heard Glog's chant, he crept up and watched the transformation magic slithering across the Wickerman. Before he could stop to be afraid, Junn leaped and tackled the apprentice in mid-incantation.

The struggle went against Junn almost at once. Glog outweighed him, outfought him, outstripped him in savagery. "Hey," said the piggish apprentice, pinning Junn to the ground and pointing the wand, "gonna be an extra hunk o' blackroot out here t' the Wickerman!" And he began his chant again, this time against Junn: "Tuatha-lungkwak—"

In explaining it later, Junn said he felt like the wand was reaching out to him. The boy had often felt odd attractions to the Aldwin's festival rituals, and to events like the reading of the bones and births of new Nelwyn children. Acting on instinct, he grabbed the other end of the blackroot wand and repeated Glog's chant. "Tuatha! L-lungkwak!"

"It was lucky for me he was such a slow talker," Junn said later. "I finished chanting even before Glog did. I just

seemed to know what came next." Junn felt a shooting pain in his arm and became afraid, but he thought intensely of Glog and the wand. Suddenly, Glog began to feel afraid! The apprentice released the wand and flung himself backward, screaming. Junn looked down and saw that Glog's right foot had twisted and darkened like blackroot.

Glog's screams drew a crowd of feasters. Before the Aldwin arrived, the panicky apprentice (still afraid of Junn and the wand) told everyone about Lugumph's dreadful scheme. When he finally appeared, the Aldwin faced an angry mob. Then and there, they called for his banishment. Lugumph and Glog left that very night, and have never since been seen in Nelwyn lands.

The village, now Aldwin-less, called upon Lilton's Aldwin to find a replacement. The Aldwin, a musty patriarch but still clearheaded, took little time choosing: "Friends, any young sprat who could manage that wand without training shows aptitude for magic. Make Junn your Aldwin. But let me train him, or he'll just get in trouble."

The villagers acclaimed this decision. After some speedy on-the-job training, Junn surrendered his name, and has been known as "Aldwin" in Willow's village ever since.

MEETING THE HIGH ALDWIN

Junn's native ability turned out to be real and significant. As High Aldwin, he has mastered great powers. Unfortunately, life in the village prevents the concentration vital to major magic.

The High Aldwin marshals his strength for a really significant spell, and at that moment a farmer knocks on his hut door asking him to bless a pig. And then he has to cure a child's wart. And there's that scroll he's been meaning to write. . . .

Left alone, with a lot of notice, the High Aldwin manages some fancy effects, such as the almost impossible teleportation spell. But in the course of daily life, he can't collect his thoughts for more than the occasional blessing or flash of light.

The Aldwin lives a simple life, in a hut at the edge of Willow's village. The hut is decorated inside and out with inscriptions, symbols, masks, painted poles in odd arrangements, colored rocks, and tattooed animal skins. Most of these have no magical purpose, but they impress visitors.

An Aldwin vows poverty on assuming office, but some Aldwins take this vow more seriously than others. The High Aldwin has little interest in money, but he likes a toothsome snack or sweet dessert now and then. Those who court his favor often approach with sweetmeats outraised. Still, the High Aldwin has been incorruptible in major matters. He keeps the village's welfare uppermost in his mind, and anything that would compromise that earns his scorn.



GAMING NOTES

15th skill-level magician

Strength: 8	Dexterity: 13
Constitution: 13	Wisdom: 17
Intelligence: 17	Charisma: 12
Hits: 35	

SKILLS

Leadership, oratory, politics, fortune-telling, counseling, amateur psychology, first aid, animal husbandry, scholarship, writing, magical research.

The High Aldwin knows all spells of good or neutral nature that are appropriate to his level. He may also know spells of higher level, but cannot (usually) concentrate long enough to cast them.

EQUIPMENT

In addition to the possessions in his hut (described above), the Aldwin owns a (nonmagical) staff that he usually carries with him. He always carries a pouch of bones for fortune-telling (see THE BONES).

KIAYA, RANON, AND MIMS

"Willow's a lucky guy, that's what I say."

—Meegosh



In Willow's village they all agree that without Kiaya, Willow would have "frayed himself to tatters" (as the Nelwyn phrase goes).

When Willow would sleep past dawn, leaving the hogs unfed and the weeds untouched, Kiaya pulls him out of bed. When Willow stumbles to the door without breakfast, Kiaya pushes him into a chair to eat. When Willow leaves a chore unattended, Kiaya is there to push or pull him toward it.

Through pushing and pulling, Kiaya plumps up her husband like a pillow, leaving him well rounded and (lately) a little chubby. Everyone knows that Willow could no more stand without Kiaya than could a pillow.

Kiaya is Willow's wife and the mother of his children, Ranon and Mims. In all the world there are no others he loves so well. They treat him less as stern ruler of the house than as good-natured uncle, but he doesn't usually mind. When they ignore his commands, it's usually for the best. When he wanted to send Elora Danan drifting downriver, they insisted on bringing her in.

Because the children are still young, Kiaya could not even think of accompanying Willow on his journey to the crossroads. But following an old Nelwyn superstition, she sent with him a braid of her hair. In village folklore braids

are the symbol of domestic affection (women usually braid their hair upon marriage). The braid comforted Willow on his lonely trip, when he was apart from Kiaya for the first time since their courtship.

COURTSHIP

Kiaya's happy childhood left its legacy: the twinkle in her eyes and the thrill in her laughter. She grew into a beautiful young Nelwyn woman, and when she reached the age of wedlock—among the Nelwyn, about sixteen—several suitors approached her father, Newgallon, to ask for her hand.

Newgallon, a foreman in the copper mines, viewed the beaux with amusement. He made them stand before him in his large home, while Kiaya baked muffins at the hearth, politely silent . . . but within earshot. Proud of his handwriting, Newgallon inscribed each suitor's name in bold round letters on a parchment nailed to a wall beam.

"I can provide her a large house on the river and plenty of food," said Dollum Wheellover.

"Aye, you shall not skimp on food," Newgallon said,



laughing; Dollum was round as a kicking ball. The father stole a sidelong glance at his daughter, who pursed her lips primly at her dirty dishes. Newgallon continued, "But that house on the river has nearly fallen in the river, you've let it run down so. Next!"

"My family is among the richest in the valley, and my father sits on the council," said Andon Vasst. "Your daughter will be honored to join us."

"Your father is a fine man, and your family is honorable," Newgallon replied as he wrote Andon's name on the lengthening list. He peered stily at Kiaya. Though she gave no hint of attention to the conversation, she regarded her muffin tins with stern disapproval.

"Yes, an honorable family," Newgallon continued, "and when you gallivant about the village late at night with your rowdy friends, and stone crows, and taunt your elders, the family must be sad. Ah, well, you may yet grow up, Andon. Meanwhile—next!"

Next came Henley Hornbeck. "I l-l-love y-your da-daughter and w-would l-l-l-l—"

What a hopeless smile Kiaya gave to her rolling pin! "Your request flatters Kiaya and myself," said Newgallon, solemnly adding Henley to the list. "I will consider and convey my decision to you soon. Next!"

HOW WILLOW FELL INTO KIAYA'S LIFE

Though he played judge, Newgallon actually passed along Kiaya's own decisions. Like many Nelwyn fathers, he would decree his daughter's marriage when (and if) his daughter found a suitor she could love. Until then, he forestalled the rest. "My dear, do none of these fellows please you?" he asked Kiaya.

She hardly looked up from her baking. "Oh, I like them all, in their ways. I just wish. . ." She sighed. "I just wish one of them could make me laugh. Or cry, or keep me awake thinking of him. Or be afraid for him."

Kiaya forgot that thought by next afternoon, when she carried a basket down a wooded path near the village. An elderly Nelwyn couple lived in the forest, and they traded part of their blueberry harvest to Kiaya for breads and candies. Now she was bringing them the muffins from the day before.

The tree branches arching overhead, garlanded with small spring leaves, cast spiky shadows on the path. Suddenly Kiaya heard a crack and a crash overhead, and a choking scream.

"Glory!" she cried, as down through the branches hurtled a shape, all limbs and grasping hands. Then the shape halted, and there, hanging by one leg from the lowest branch, covered with twigs and twig scratches, dangled a young Nelwyn.

It's that silly Ufgood boy, Kiaya realized. "Willow! Are you all right?"

"Hnnrghhghh," said Willow, and then, distinctly, "Owww."

After she helped him down, she asked, "What in all the

valley were you doing up there?"

"I'm sure I'll remember in a moment," said Willow. He uncrossed his eyes. "Oh, hello, Kiaya. —Oh yes. I was searching for a blue robin's egg to use in my magic act. And I found a beauty, too!" he said.

He flung open one hand, and Kiaya jumped back. "Oh, drat!" said Willow. "Sorry about that. It was whole when I got it. Did any pieces get on you? Here, we can clean that yolk off at the river." He limped off toward River Freen. Kiaya followed, to make sure he wouldn't fall in.

"Are you hurt?" she asked at the shore.

"Oh, no, no. Well, maybe. I always thought I could use a couple of extra joints in my legs anyway," he said, and Kiaya laughed. She hadn't realized how much Willow had grown over the years. That stubby little boy she used to play with at Festival had magically turned into a fine young Nelwyn man.

"Be glad you don't have to climb trees for your magic act." She giggled. "Your position there looked pretty undignified."

"Painful, too."

She washed the egg's remains from her dress, then made a splint for his sprained finger. He talked all the while about his new tricks, plans, and his dream of becoming the High Aldwin's apprentice.

"I was heading for the river anyway, to fish for copperbacks," he said. "Imagine how everyone will gasp when I pull away a scarf from my table and there are beautiful fish swimming in a bowl! 'Oh, Willow, how did you do it?' they'll say. The Aldwin will appoint me on the spot. 'Willow, my boy—'"

His puff-cheeked imitation of the Aldwin made Kiaya snicker. She couldn't understand how Willow had grown so charming, as though overnight.

"Look, you see them near the shallows here?" said Willow, pointing out the swimming copperbacks. "I've even got a hook in my pocket, too—Owww!"

While she cut the hook out of his thumb, Kiaya asked, "What will you use for bait?"

"I had some worms in my pocket, but the fall out of the tree didn't agree with them at all."

She laughed again. "Do you think fish like blueberry muffins?"

"If they have any sense they do! You have some?"

They put a pinch of muffin on Willow's hook, and the rest in Willow's mouth. Fish leaped for the bait, forestalling Willow's own leap for the muffin basket. "Delicious!" he said. (With his mouth full of muffin, it came out "Velimmfrmmf") He swallowed and added, "Those copperbacks will be patrolling my fishbowl in no time."

But somehow they lost interest in fish. Talking first about the muffins, then her cooking, then her life and his, the village and the villagers, the weather, the birds, rain and wind, magic, monsters, heroes, and wishes, they ended up stretched out on the grassy bank, watching a glowing spring sunset over River Freen.

In the twilight their conversation turned, tentatively, to love. At first the young Nelwyns lay looking up at the emerging stars, discussing love in the abstract, like a class topic. Gradually, circling in toward their own lives, they sat up and looked at the river, pulled their knees up and looked at the grass, clasped their arms around their legs tightly and

WILLOW

looked at nothing. They talked a long while.

In full darkness he walked her home. They forgot both hook and basket. By the light of her home's torches and of Newgallon's careful gaze, they finally looked at each other, and they smiled.

Willow left, Newgallon shut the door, and Kiaya ran to the list of suitors posted by the hearth. She crossed off every name, and at the bottom wrote in big letters, "WILLOW UPGOOD."

RANON AND MIMS

After a courtship of socially acceptable length, Willow and Kiaya married. Marriage calmed Willow noticeably, and he became less accident-prone. Kiaya never discouraged his dream of becoming apprentice Aldwin. But she was glad that Willow also gave thought to planting, mending fences, and reality in general.

After another socially acceptable interval, Kiaya gave birth to their boy Ranon. Mims, the daughter, followed a year and some months later. The parents lavished affection on the children, even by generous Nelwyn standards. "I feel complete for the first time," Willow once said. Some villagers (notably Burglekutt) thought Willow remained incomplete, especially in regard to brains. But they all agreed Willow and Kiaya made good parents.

Apart from their chores, Ranon and Mims spend time as all Nelwyn children do. They take lessons in history and folklore from the High Aldwin, learn reading and arithmetic from their mother, and play with other children. They grind pigments and sand wooden slats to make paintings. Soon they will be old enough to go to the village archives to read, or to swim in the river and explore in the forest.

Since Willow returned from his adventure, well along on the path toward great sorcery, villagers often speculate about Ranon and Mims. There is some evidence, though not much, that the gift of magic is hereditary. No one can

explain where Willow got his; but every villager has a story about how Ranon can spot fish in the river just before they leap, or how Mims did a painting of some event that later came true.

It's much too early to say. But everyone is watching closely.

GAMING NOTES

0 skill-level normal Nelwyn

Strength: 6	Dexterity: 12
Constitution: 13	Wisdom: 12
Intelligence: 13	Charisma: 8
Hits: 12	

SKILLS

Cooking and other domestic skills, parenting, first aid, persuasion, conversation. No combat skills.

Ranon and Mims

For the children, use the typical Nelwyn statistics (see NELWYNS). Ranon is interested in his father's stage magic. Mims shows talent for painting. Both can read and are learning to write, but have not yet gained other skills.



MEEGOSH

"Of course it is not for me to judge the likes of young Meegosh, however irresponsible, rude, and juvenile he may be."

—Burglekutt



Willow and Meegosh have been best friends since early childhood. That friendship was never more strongly tested than when Willow needed someone to go with him to the Daikini crossroads. Meegosh volunteered with only slight hesitation.

Meegosh was also the only one who stuck by Willow when Burglekutt took Vohnkar and the warriors back to the village. His devotion earned him an injured arm when he and Willow fell into the pit trap in the fairy forest. But the fairies sprinkled the limb with a sweet-smelling powder; and by the next day it had healed almost completely.

In the forest clearing the fairy queen, Cherlindrea, told Willow he must continue on his journey with Elora. Meegosh said to her (when Willow could not hear), "I guess, then, I'm, uh, not going to be much help to Willow, or Elora." —One of those statements that is really a question.

From nowhere he felt a sudden brush down one cheek, a caress. "Think more highly of yourself, little one. You may be needed at your village." But Meegosh found no comfort in this; he felt downcast at leaving his friend. Cherlindrea continued, "And your own task is great. You must cross dangerous wilderness without your warrior friends to protect you."

Meegosh had already thought of this, many times. He had already imagined many things that could happen, all involving blood, all of the blood his. In his mind he had lined up many cogent objections to the whole idea.

But he thought of Willow, going forward into more danger than Meegosh would face going back. Willow didn't complain. At least not much. And when Meegosh stood before Cherlindrea, beautiful shining Cherlindrea, and the forest leaves rippled around her and scents of flowers filled the air—well, a Nelwyn is not made to argue policy with fairy queens. His thoughts jumbled, his objections dispelled, Meegosh prepared to leave the forest.

Then Cherlindrea said, "I will send along an escort of brownies, to guide and protect you."

"Brownies?" said Meegosh. "Protect? Me?"

"Us!" said a voice at his feet. A stout brownie, nine inches tall and probably that much around the middle, stood before him, dressed in leaf skirts and an acorn-shell cap. "I'm Kunkly, and this is my associate Witterwell."

He slapped one fleshy arm around the shoulders of a lanky, sandy-haired, almost-naked brownie. Feathers covered his waist, and bands of colored paint curled along each of his limbs. While Kunkly's eyes darted around alertly,

even scornfully, Witterwell favored piercing stares of unreasonable length. "Not much," said Witterwell, scrutinizing Meegosh. "He'll need help."

"Indeed," agreed Kunkly. "Lad's likely to get his guts splattered without us to defend him." The two of them together might have weighed six pounds.

"Is this a joke?" Meegosh asked.

THE JOURNEY HOME

It was not. Soon they headed south through the forest. With dawn not far past, the sky looked less blue than white, a washed-out color that fit Meegosh's state of mind perfectly. "I don't suppose you characters can cast fireballs, or something useful like that," he said as he picked his way along a narrow path.

"Fireballs, pah!" said Kunkly. "Who needs magic when you've got a strong bow and deadly accurate aim?" He brandished a bow about the size of a cheese slicer. "Let the bears and wolves attack. We'll splatter their guts!"

"Uh-huh. Nothing magic, then?"

"Got some fairy dust here," said Witterwell. At his waist Meegosh spied a thread holding a marble-sized bag. "You notice how clean the path is here, don't you?"

"Uh, yes. Why?"

"I tell you why," said Witterwell, staring back at the Nelwyn. "'Cause we brownies cleared it. Dead leaves, dead brown leaves!"

"People rave about forest beauty. Peace. Silence. Autumn painting the trees in fiery reds and oranges. Do these nature lovers show up when winter comes, and all the fiery reds and oranges cover the ground waist-deep? Forest beauty! Blasted mess, I say. Work like pigs carrying a hundred million dead dry brown leaves out of the forest, and by the time you're done, the year's gone round and it's autumn again. Makes me sick."

The conversation continued on this elevated plane through the morning and past noon. They left the fairy forest behind and entered a long stretch of underbrush, travelling parallel to the southern road. Tall weeds grew over the path; Kunkly and Witterwell found them tough going. Taking a vote (with no suffrage granted to Nelwyns), they decided to ride on Meegosh's shoulders, one on each like epaulets.

ARRIVING HOME

Once Meegosh heard a horn call in the distance. The Army of Nockmaar? He thought of Willow heading toward—where? Away from safety, anyway. And here was Meegosh, plodding back to the same life he'd always known. He felt confused, not knowing which of the two was better off. Like any Nelwyn, he preferred a safe, peaceful existence; but like any youthful Nelwyn, he daydreamed of adventure, exciting battles, fearsome creatures. . . .

Thinking these thoughts as he walked down the path, Meegosh noticed one of his epaulets, Kunkly, disappear into the grass. Then he smelled something. . . . Half a second later, he saw the bear.

Bears grow very big in the wilderness outside Nelwyn Valley. To a Nelwyn any bear is "very big," but this gigantic grizzly exceeded all standards. Meegosh saw bristly brown fur, black eyes, and above all, teeth. The bear's scars marked triumph in many past battles; now, with a hollow growl, it declared another. The creature would have sent a squad of Daikini soldiers running. But the Nelwyn couldn't move the width of a hair.

In the moment before the bear charged, Meegosh found time to think many things. *No weapons. Wish Vohnkar was here. How can something so big move that fast? They'll never find me out here. Mother.*

Intent on the charging beast, he hardly noticed the movement on his shoulder. Witterwell calmly reached into his bag of fairy dust. The brownie waited for the bear to come within the range of a breath, then with a casual motion threw a thimbleful of powder into the bear's eyes. "Scat!" he shouted.

The bear did not scat. Instead, it veered over like a galleon capsizing and drove nosefirst into the dirt beside the path. Weeds flew up and landed on the hulking body. The bear let out a deep snore.

"That's another thing," said Witterwell. "Always count on dumb animals to make a big mess. And who cleans up that mess? You know it, the brownies. A castle, I'd like a castle. May be drafty, but you don't have to weed it."

Meegosh discovered he could speak. "Whuh?" But he didn't have anything to say. In a sudden clean motion, he sat down on the path.

Kunkly peered over a leaf beside the path. "Is the bear asleep?"

"Yeh," said Witterwell.

The fat brownie pushed aside the grass and marched out. "Hah! Lucky for him! I thought I saw his mate coming up from the other side, and I went to chase her off. Turned out to be a squirrel. Good for this brute I wasn't here. I'd have splattered his guts!" He hauled back and kicked it in the snout. The bear snored again, and Kunkly leaped away.

After half an hour Meegosh felt ready to rejoin the living. During the rainy afternoon's journey he collected thoughts the bear had efficiently scattered. That night he made a campfire and foraged, finding winter cress, walnuts, and persimmons for his dinner. The brownies ate nothing, so far as Meegosh could tell.

He got little sleep on the cold ground, but a featherbed would have served him no better. Tossing and turning, he decided he did not much like adventure.

Fortunately, there were no more bears, or adventures. Late the next day Meegosh glimpsed the familiar hills at the edge of Nelwyn Valley. They scaled a gentle slope to a saddle between two hills. There was his village not far below, and nearby lay a pile of rotting boards he knew well. He sat by them to rest before the final leg of the journey. "Gotten pretty worm-eaten," he said aloud. "We'll have to replace those boards soon."

"Why? What are they?" asked the brownies.

Meegosh was about to reply when he looked up. Suddenly he felt like he'd fallen through a crack in time into the previous morning, seeing the bear for the first time. There, fifty yards away, prowled one of Bavmorda's Death Dogs!

It hadn't seen him. He crouched down, shushing the brownies. This time he had a few moments to think. The Dogs couldn't track well by scent, so he didn't have to worry whether he was downwind or not. In fact, the Death Dog wasn't even heading this way. Meegosh breathed a sigh of relief.

Then he realized the beast was bound for the village below. His village. Just like the Death Dog that disrupted the festival, this one must be searching for Elora Danan. Had Vohnkar and his warriors returned to the village? Meegosh's mind raced, thinking of the Dog's potential victims. Uncle Lardetter, and Willow's family, and Meegosh's mother . . .

"We have to stop that thing!" he hissed to the brownies. "Quick, get out some more fairy dust."

"None left," said Witterwell.

"No worry anyway," Kunkly added. "The beast is moving away from us. It's not even looking this way."

Fears still churning in his mind, Meegosh looked for a weapon. The boards? Foolish, couldn't hope to defeat a Death Dog with a rotted board from a—

"That's it," he said, peeling off his tunic. "Here, get inside, both of you."

"Huh?—Wait a min-uff!—Wffayoo doong?"

Wrapping the struggling brownies in the cloth, Meegosh leaped up. The air was cool here, and he decided that was why he was shaking. Nothing to be afraid of, think of the village, it's just one Dog. "Heyyyyy!" he cried. "Hey, Dog! Looking for the baby? I've got it right here!" He waved the bundle.

The Death Dog spun around. Spotting its prey instantly, it rushed to the kill. Meegosh thought the bear was fast; he didn't know what "fast" meant until he saw the Death Dog lay its ears back, pull in its tail, stretch out full length, and run. Beautiful, in a way. Fifty yards away, forty, twenty—he backed away—

The Dog struck the pile of boards and gathered for the leap and the kill. The boards broke with a moist crack, and the animal plunged down the abandoned mineshaft. Meegosh heard a surprised yelp, the first sound the Death Dog had made, and the last. The thud came after a long delay, barely audible.

Meegosh shouted down the shaft:

WILLOW

*Twenty, forty, sixty yards,
Miners dig for copper bars
When the bars have all been mined.
Only shadows stay behind.
Aroooo! Aroooo! Aroooo!*

"Vdmoo thmvmms doing?" screamed Kunkly as he struggled free of the cloth.

Meegosh unrolled the brownies and donned his tunic. He felt calm. "I think I can make it the rest of the way from here," he said. "Thanks for the help. Couldn't have done it without you."

"Done what?" The brownies peered down the mineshaft.

"Spla—No. Too obvious. Did I ever thank you for saving my life? I'll never say nasty things about a brownie again."

"Excuse us if we don't return the favor," Kunkly said huffily, retrieving his fallen acorn cap. But Meegosh was already out of earshot, ambling down the hillside toward the village, where his mother waited for him. He decided he didn't mind a certain amount of adventure, given time to prepare for it.

GAMING NOTES

1st skill-level fighter

Strength: 7	Dexterity: 12
Constitution: 11	Wisdom: 10
Intelligence: 13	Charisma: 8
Hits: 12	

SKILLS

Folklore, survival skills such as foraging. Meegosh also plays the reed pipes.

Some thief skills, such as the abilities to move silently and to hide, are also appropriate. Treat Meegosh as a 2nd-level "thief" for this purpose.

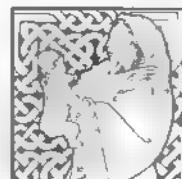
EQUIPMENT

Reed pipes, sometimes parchment and ink when he wants to take notes.

ETHNA

"Find her! As you fear my power, find that woman!"

—Bavmorda



Few knew her in life, and not many know her name today. But for two months after the birth of Elora Danan, the midwife Ethna was possibly the most important person in all the kingdoms.

She carried Elora from the dungeon beneath Nockmaar Castle. With the army of Nockmaar at her heels, she crossed and recrossed the wilderness on a random course. One time she returned almost to Nockmaar Castle, a move so unexpected none thought to look for her there. Finally reaching River Freen, Ethna built a small raft of reeds, and set the child adrift on the current. Moments later, the Death Dogs attacked Ethna and killed her.

She died alone, far from any shelter, with none to mark her passing. Fin Raziel has written, "Bavmorda was destroyed by armies and heroes. Thanks and glory and good wishes to them all. But their effort hinged on Ethna's bravery. Had she been a hair less cautious, had her courage once faltered, the labor of armies would have gone for nothing."

"Bavmorda, who built mountains and toppled kingdoms—destroyed by this old woman with swollen joints and tattered robes. Her greatness humbles me."

THE JOURNEY FROM NOCKMAAR

It is not known how Ethna came to Nockmaar's dungeons. Princess Sorsha knew her only as a servant in her mother's castle. Otherwise, our sole knowledge of Ethna comes from a party of hunters who found her in the mountains near Nockmaar.

"Hunting near river, happened on woman cradling child in arms," the terse account begins. "Old, very dirty and ragged, looked withered like oak bark. Asked leave to sit, she did not attend. We sat, she began to moan, recited woes, as nearly as we can recall as follows:

"O child, Elora, am too weak for thee. Crooked back must bear not only your weight but Bavmorda's and her army's. Aching legs must outrun packs of dogs. My heart still pounds strong for love of you, for glory waiting. Fate like mad parent, acts in love and spite by turns, giving you at time most needed, trusting you to me alone. Infants together before Fate, dances us like father in play."

"Moaned. Said more we do not recollect. Mentioned dungeons under Nockmaar, we grew nervous. Thought to leave. Then child laughed.

"Laughter wonderful. Soothed all. Woman cried, but happy now. Talked to us, said name was Ethna. Child was Elora, said she was child of prophecy, would overthrow Bavmorda." The account mentions the few other details we

know. But the midwife appeared reluctant to speak of herself.

Soon the party heard a Nockmaar patrol approach, setting the scene for one of many sacrifices in the war against Bavmorda

"FOR NIRIENSA"

The three hunters were a husband and wife, Khaldyn and Latarre, and Khaldyn's best friend, Roke. Nockmaar had annexed their village a year before. The army had seized all food supplies, so the three hunted to feed their families. They had much to lose if the patrol caught them with the midwife.

As the account has it, they looked at one another, but did not discuss what to do. Roke asked, "For Niriensa?" and the others nodded. Then they helped up the old midwife and set off down the canyon.

They were hunting in a steep gorge with sides of shingled rock. A minor stream, the Rance, which had carved this gorge, still flowed sluggishly between its sloping walls. As they escorted the old woman to their raft, the hunters heard echoes in the gorge, the sound of approaching warriors.

They shoved off from shore and drifted downstream, not needing the poles they used to push their way to the hunting ground. "Old woman fascinated. Seemed not to have ridden raft before. Asked questions. Mumbled to herself."





AFTERMATH

A minute behind them, a tribe of Pohas, subhuman savages riding armored warhorses, galloped into the stream. "Howled, waved swords, screamed in strange language. Roke said, 'Soon upon us. Let me off here.'

"No time to argue. Poled to shore, steep place of gorge, many loose rocks. Roke saluted, pushed us into current, climbed."

The Poha squad followed standard tactics, namely an all-out frontal charge. This berserk rush, always amid screeching war cries, has demoralized far superior forces. But the hunters kept their wits.

Splashing through the shallows, the Pohas quickly gained on the raft. Seeing Roke climb the steep bank, half the Pohas broke off to pursue.

Roke threw small rocks downhill, skidded with arms wide, grabbed and threw larger rocks, all in hopes of starting a rockslide. The Pohas dismounted and raced up the slope, laughing. They came within ten feet of him, says the account, "when we [that is, those still on the raft] heard shouts, noises, deep cracking sounds.

"Huge roar echoed down gorge. Lost sight of Pohas in dust clouds. Roke lost footing, slid down, more rocks fell after him. Heard him shout 'Niriensa.' No more sounds after that."

That left three Pohas following the raft. The Rance flows slowly along that stretch, just before a flight of stairstep rapids. And it is shallow, as the Pohas soon realized. They stampeded for the raft.

Khaldyn took time enough to embrace his wife, and then leaped from the raft into knee-deep water, only yards in front of the lead Poha.

With just enough time to nock an arrow and draw his bow, Khaldyn shot the horse. It slid headfirst into the river, the Poha leaped onto Khaldyn, and both fell into the current, fighting all the way down the rapids. Later reports mention two bodies found downstream.

The remaining two Pohas reached the raft. "One leaped onto raft from his horse, upsetting raft and spilling all of us into water. I landed better, got up fast, killed him with dagger. Old woman protected baby, waded to shore. Last Poha's horse panicked by upset raft, threw rider off."

Latarre, the only surviving hunter, used the chance to catch up to Ethna on shore. Unhurt though exhausted, Ethna said the soldiers were hunting her and the baby. She would take the child and leave, so that Latarre could survive.

But in the last of these many mysterious acts of sacrifice, Latarre stayed by Ethna, intending to go with her as protector. Unfortunately, the surviving Poha attacked, and in the midst of battle, Latarre did not see Ethna running off into the forest, carrying the child.

"Could not beat Poha," Latarre's account concludes. "Hamstrung me, but I wounded him so he could not follow woman. Then Nockmaar minions showed up, took me prisoner."

The account was transcribed in the nearby Nockmaar camp by a minion who wrote none too well. His undoubtedly slowness in recording her words must have prolonged Latarre's torture by several minutes, but at last she was allowed to expire.

She may have hoped, though she could not know, that she and her friends had rescued the instrument of Bavmorda's destruction. And the raft may well have given the midwife the idea to send Elora drifting downstream when her own death proved inevitable.

The account shows Latarre died bravely, still defying Nockmaar's rule, and claiming revenge for "Niriensa." At the last, her account finally explains Niriensa's identity.

She was Roke's wife, and close friend to both Khaldyn and Latarre. She was expecting her first child when Bavmorda's troops took her to the dungeons of Nockmaar, as were all expectant mothers while Bavmorda waited for the birth of Elora Danan. In a damp cell Niriensa and her unborn child sickened and died. By protecting Ethna and the infant, Niriensa's husband and friends seized the chance to revenge her.

So in yet another way, Bavmorda's savagery proved her own downfall.

GAMING NOTES

0 skill-level normal person

Strength: 8	Dexterity: 10
Constitution: 11	Wisdom: 13
Intelligence: 10	Charisma: 9
Hits: 8	

SKILLS

Midwifery, infant care, stealth, wilderness survival. Ethna has no weapon skills and is treated as a normal old woman in your game system.

EQUIPMENT

None.

BURGLEKUTT

"Pompous, greedy, interfering old busybody
—ah, Burglekutt! I was just looking for you."
—The High Aldwin



Prefect with wealth / Is bad for one's health," goes the proverb in Nelwyn Valley. But when a rich Prefect comes to power in a village, that proverb is never spoken . . . at least not above a whisper. Citizens know that provoking a Prefect's temper is, well, bad for one's health. Willow knows.

BURGLEKUTT'S RISE

In his youth, when the Ageless Oak in Willow's village rose no higher than a miner's ladder, Burglekutt had not yet become wealthy. "Money, phaugh!" he tells young Nelwyns now. "I had not the gold to fill a hen's tooth, nor silver to the width of a baby's hair. I earned every coin of my fortune through hard work at low wages, and no complaints from me!"

The "hard work" Burglekutt speaks of was his early marriage to Klondetta, daughter of the village cobbler. The old shoemaker was said to have hidden wealth. That rumor was the only asset Klondetta had in securing a husband, for she was homely, shrill, dull, lazy, and quarrelsome.

But young Burglekutt swore undying love for Klondetta. They had their first fight over how to put the ring on her finger at the wedding, the second over what songs to sing at the reception, and other quarrels followed at roughly equal intervals for the next several years.

Burglekutt may have made "no complaints," but at the village tavern he offered many spirited commentaries on Klondetta's manners, her dreadful cooking, their home, his poverty, her befuddled father, the father's customers, and the way Klondetta snored.

At last the old man died, leaving Klondetta a small inheritance, but giving Burglekutt nothing but his cobbling tools. Burglekutt despised shoemaking and Klondetta equally, and—since Klondetta showed no urge to spend her legacy—the couple's quarrels grew louder every day. Burglekutt, never charming in the first place, now took on the surly demeanor that marks him today.

Years passed. The Ageless Oak grew a few more rings, but its trunk expanded slightly less than Burglekutt's did. Then one summer night a heavy thunderstorm rolled into Nelwyn Valley. Lightning bolts set several patches of forest afire. The fire spread to the home of Burglekutt and Klondetta.

It was late at night, and the village firemen were asleep. The wooden hut went up like, well, firewood. Burglekutt escaped narrowly, wearing nothing but his nightshirt and clutching nothing but his meager savings (his most prized possession). Klondetta did not escape. "How tragic!" said Burglekutt.

After the fire, Burglekutt rooted through the wreckage until he found a burnt sack of coins—Klondetta's legacy, which had been well hidden during her life. Burglekutt used it to repair his home. After a mourning period of well over a day and a half, he let it be known that he was running for the council.

THE ELECTION

He kicked off his campaign with a lavish party in the town square. It must have cost most of his legacy, for he had loaves of fresh bread stacked high like bricks, sliced copperback with red sauce served cold, salad in heaping bowls, grilled trout, onion soup under thick cheese crusts, shaved ice flavored with fruit juice (to clear the palate), a ham as large as a child, glistening fried fowl in crisp skins that made the mouth water, sautéed vegetables bought from every garden in town, water, wine, eggnog, and—rarest of treats!—ice cream.

Burglekutt secured many friends, or at least voters, at his party. More parties followed. Though no villagers could call him genial, they could believe that laying a good table shows administrative ability.

Burglekutt's opponent was Orlin Openwall, well respected but not well-to-do. He threw no parties; he felt it was not appropriate behavior for a candidate. But Orlin's closest friends and supporters, while complaining about Burglekutt's "fancy spending," still stood in line for seconds at Burglekutt's feasts. Yet Orlin stuck to his principles, never threw a party, and never attended Burglekutt's—though during the feasts he was left practically alone in the village.

Elections in Nelwyn villages are usually relaxed affairs. But as this election approached, all talk turned to the contest. Women chatted around the town well for hours. Old ale-drinking farmers in the village commons actually argued the candidates' merits (unheard of!). Opinion favored Orlin over Burglekutt, but not definitely. And Orlin was known to be worried.



The night before the election, with the vote too close to call, Burglekutt paid a visit to Orlin's small dwelling. No one knows what they discussed, but the talk lasted hours.

The next morning both candidates rose early, and both said they had slept peacefully. Burglekutt journeyed to the polls in the town commons, but instead of putting his vote-stone in the appropriate bowl, he climbed onto the poll table.

"Friends," he cried to the puzzled crowd, "I report with deep and genuine sorrow that illness prevents me from serving on the council, should you decide to elevate me so. In accepting your wishes for a speedy recovery, I ask in return that you elect Orlin, a Nelwyn closer to me than brother's blood."

Orlin won splendidly. The villagers agreed Burglekutt had withdrawn with grace and good spirit, though they were surprised to learn he was sick. Fortunately, the disease, whatever it was, passed quickly. Orlin served well on the council, and became Burglekutt's close associate.

Now the aged village Prefect, Corbell, had served faithfully for many years. Everyone knew he would soon pass on. Not unexpectedly, he fell mortally ill a few months after the election and resigned his office. The council met to discuss the appointment of his successor.

Though Corbell recommended several likely replacements, council member Orlin argued strongly for Burglekutt. The rest of the council had enjoyed Burglekutt's lavish parties, and when Corbell finally died during the deliberations, Orlin's nomination carried the day. When the council informed Burglekutt, he said, "Bless me, I never expected this high honor!"

By sheer luck he had been perusing the village bylaws, and had become familiar with the Prefect's office. Overcoming his astonishment, he plunged into his duties with vigor.

THE PREFECTURE AND THE PREFECT

Council members are elected by the villagers, but the Prefect is appointed by the council, for life. The Prefect manages the village's day-to-day upkeep, supervises the huge archives, presides (with the High Aldwin) at weddings, performs minor administrative functions, and—most important—collects taxes.

Burglekutt's generosity seemed to grow with his fortune, for he was happy to pay many struggling farmers' taxes himself. All he asked as collateral was the deeds to their farms. No one worried much about this as the years passed. Then there were two bad growing years in a row, and suddenly Burglekutt owned many a farm in Willow's village.

Ufgood Reach, Willow's farm, was one of the few holdouts. Burglekutt covetted that narrow strip of riverfront land with the greed of a child who wants every single blueberry on a bush. Schnorr Ufgood had never borrowed money, a wise practice that his son, Willow, continued. But Burglekutt had other ways to get at Ufgood Reach.

He bought up every merchant's farm equipment and seed grain, then tripled the prices. "Supply and demand," he said, responding to villagers' objections. Of course, Burglekutt's farms had the supply at no cost, while Willow couldn't afford to demand an ounce of seed.

By the time Elora drifted to the shore of Ufgood Reach, Willow was stretched thin. He borrowed seed grain from friendly neighbors, then (to avoid getting the neighbors in trouble) told Burglekutt that he and his family had gathered the grain in the wild. The dodge infuriated Burglekutt. Elora and the mission to the crossroads looked to Burglekutt like a convenient way to dispose of Willow and take his farm. But the High Aldwin saw through that scheme and sent Burglekutt along!

The cowardly Prefect then had to take Vohnkar and his soldiers to defend himself—and incidentally Willow and the child. Of course, once they arrived at the crossroads, Burglekutt wanted to get rid of Elora as soon as possible and get home. If that meant leaving Willow and Meegosh behind, so much the better for Burglekutt.

But when Willow returned in triumph from his adventure, now in command of powerful magic, Burglekutt realized the balance of power in the village had shifted.

GAMING NOTES

1st skill-level thief

Strength: 7	Dexterity: 7
Constitution: 9	Wisdom: 7
Intelligence: 12	Charisma: 6
Hits: 10	

SKILLS

Politics, oratory, bullying, extortion, market manipulation. Absolutely no combat skills.

EQUIPMENT

Assessor's notebook, money pouch.

VOHNKAR

"Not Vohnkar! He's the best warrior in the village. You can't send him. Vohnkar, step back."

—Burglekutt



Nelwyn Valley is a sleepy place, yet every Nelwyn village has its warriors. Intruders sometimes disrupt the villagers' peace, like thunderbolts jarring sleepers into awareness of the real world. Wolves invade during hard winters, and two-footed predators—Daikini bandits—have ventured down into the valley, thinking the little folk easy prey. Survivors' reports discourage further visits.

Vohnkar, commander of the soldiers in Willow's village, has confronted invaders his predecessors never faced. After the birth of Elora Danan, Bavmorda sent many scouts and Death Dogs across the lands. Some of these found Nelwyn Valley, and a few reached Willow's village.

Vohnkar's soldiers dared not kill Bavmorda's minions, even if they could, for it could bring the army's retribution. So they settled for a show of force, which at least amused the minions. The Nelwyn soldiers also found a few Death Dogs roaming free, and these they treated with less respect.

Soldiers in Nelwyn villages occupy a peculiar, shadowy situation. Everyone recognizes their importance, but they lack status. The job is usually hereditary, because villagers assume no one would choose it freely. In the past it was not even proper to acknowledge warriors. Now the Nelwyns regard them as, at best, a needed unpleasantness.

Vohnkar, though, has attained a rare position. Not only do the Nelwyns respect him, they genuinely like him for his bravery and good temper, and also for his skill in spinning yarns drawn from his extensive travels. And some older villagers may feel sympathy for the trials of his youth.

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

Vohnkar's family tree, unlike the deep-rooted lineages of other villagers, yields seeds that drift away across the valley. "They're a footloose crowd, that lot," other villagers say, thinking especially of Vohnkar's father, Mergando.

With stuck-up hair, puffy cheeks, and swollen fingers, Mergando looked like something had pumped him too full, making him bulge with inner pressures. He commanded the village's soldiers, but was not well liked. Very tall and strong for a Nelwyn, he displayed other traits rare in the village: drunkenness, self-pity, and a consuming wanderlust.

His wife of long years and silent suffering, Solia, bore her troubles without complaint. She was kind and self-sacrificing by nature, seldom showing her cares among the villagers. And she never scolded Vohnkar in place of Mergando. He could not have found a better, more loving mother, just as his choice of fathers could not have been worse.

Sometimes, usually during a festival when the village's gaiety threw her problems into sharper relief, Solia spoke of her distress to her closest friends. In a calm voice, as if describing horrors of the distant past, Solia told them of the present. Mergando's drinking binges. His violent rages, even against little Vohnkar! His maudlin maundering on loneliness and isolation. "I died tomorrow, there wouldn't be ten people at my funeral," he often said.

One night when Vohnkar was about thirteen, Mergando roused him from a sound sleep and rousted him out of bed. The smell of liquor was suffocating. "Gonna teach you howta fight once fer all," Mergando said, slurring his words.

When Mergando strapped an oversize leather vest on the boy, Solia tried to reason with him. When Mergando gathered an armful of weapons and gave the boy a spear, Solia implored him, for love of his family, to stop. When Mergando pulled the boy out into the cool night beneath a quarter moon, Solia began to shout. Lamplight appeared in the windows of the neighbors' huts.

But nothing stopped Mergando. In the darkness his eyes were dark hollows, like a skull's sockets. He dumped the spare weapons, shortswords and daggers, onto the dewy ground. "Raise yer spear," he commanded. Confused and frightened, Vohnkar did so, barely keeping his balance with the heavy weapon. "Now, defend yerself like a soldier!" Mergando said.

He charged. Vohnkar wavered, not knowing what to do, and in that moment of hesitation, Mergando swept under the spear's point, jerked it away, and clubbed Vohnkar to the ground. "No!" cried Solia, while Mergando cursed the boy's cowardice. "Call that bravery? Little wretch, gotta learn to fight!" He struck again with the butt of the spear, and again, while Vohnkar screamed.

Others rushed out from their homes, just in time to hear Mergando screech like a cat. He staggered away, clutching his neck, while Solia stared, amazed, at the dagger in her hands.

There was silence for the space of a long sigh, a moment fixed in Vohnkar's memory like a scene from a vivid dream. The villagers in their nightclothes; a sliver of moon turning

the clouds silvery gray; cool air and the smell of wet grass; blood thick in his mouth, pounding in his temples, staining his mother's hands.

With a snarl Mergando limped away into the darkness, and no one ever saw him again. (No funeral was held.) Solia helped Vohnkar back to bed, treated his bruises as best she could, and told him to go back to sleep. Vohnkar lay awake for a long time, deciding he would never become a soldier like his father. Finally he fell asleep.

That night Vohnkar had his first dream of Tir Asleen.

Solia never fully recovered from the shock of that episode. She could not sleep for the nightmares, and during the day her mind wandered. She still loved Vohnkar. But she often burst into tears for no immediate reason, and would not speak for long intervals.

After several weeks, she seemed to sleep more easily. But one night Vohnkar was awakened by soldiers, his father's subordinates. They had found Solia walking at the edge of River Freen. "I don't remember what happened," said his mother, shaking. "I closed my eyes in bed. When I opened them, I was standing in cold water."

Vohnkar brought his mother in and fed her. He had begun hunting in the forest, doing well enough that they did not go hungry. She talked to him for over an hour, telling him how his father went wrong and how to behave better. He said, "I don't want to be a warrior." His mother answered, "Do what you feel is right." At last they both went back to sleep.

But Solia's sleepwalking did not end. Every few weeks a soldier up late or a farmer up early found her walking

jerkily, dressed in nightclothes and asking for her family. Awakening, she could not remember how she got there. Then one night Solia disappeared and did not return. Her tracks led to the river. This time a funeral was held, attended by the entire village.

Vohnkar, now an orphan, could not find tears to cry at the funeral. That night, and for many nights afterward, he dreamt of Tir Asleen.

A D R E A M V I S I T

The High Aldwin had told Vohnkar and the other village children about Tir Asleen. Even at its height, the great kingdom was no more than a legend to the Nelwyns. Now, though none in the village realized it, Tir Asleen had fallen, passing into legend everywhere else as well.

The fables of Tir Asleen haunted Vohnkar's imagination, and his dreams. His dreams left him tense in the shoulders and limbs, gasping when he awakened, and more tired than when he went to sleep.

They were all the same. Vohnkar saw a castle of white stone, soaring towers, and banners in bright colors. He flew in like an eagle, his shadow the tiniest spot on the green meadows. As he landed in the courtyard, cheers arose.

In the dream, the castle was filled with the Nelwyns of his village. "We know you can't sleep," they said. "Come





with us to a nice place to sleep." Vohnkar followed them through dark passages whose shadows hid wonderful statues like the Wickerman, and rich rooms filled with furniture for giants. He thought, "What amazing people live in Tir Asleen!"

But then he realized he had lost sight of his guides. He ran, looking for them. But they were always just around the next bend. He ran and ran, and finally he woke up feeling stiff, clammy, and disappointed. A few nights later he would dream again of Tir Asleen, but he never found the promised sleeping place.

TRAVELLING

An aunt and uncle took Vohnkar in after his mother died, and he liked them well enough.

But growing into adolescence, he also grew tired of the village.

So one spring day he bade farewell to his aunt and uncle and set out for the north. Vohnkar did not realize, though everyone else did, that he departed at the same time of the year that Mergando had always chosen for his own wanderings.

He travelled to the crossroads, then west, leaving the road to avoid contact with "Daikini giants." He crossed deserted fields that had once been farmland. Pitching his bedroll on the plains, he slept beneath the stars, with an impenetrable maze of rocky canyons in the distance. He could not have imagined that the castle of his dreams stood beyond them, cursed by Bavmorda's magic.

After a month or so he reached the Inland Sea to the west. More trustful of Daikinis by then, he approached them openly. The riders of the western steppes, unfamiliar with "Pecks," found him astonishing. But their knowledge of Tir Asleen had already given way to legends, for they had no thought for lands beyond their trade routes.

They believed Tir Asleen lay "to the north," and so Vohnkar worked his way up the seacoast. His dreams grew less intense as the sights he saw occupied more of his attention. The coastal cliffs, magnificently carved by nature and by primitive peoples, fascinated him. He began to understand, as few Nelwyns could, how large was the world and how many wonders it held.

Once he helped defend the nomads against a Poha attack, acquitting himself with honor. He was surprised to find that although he did not enjoy the battle, he wasn't sickened or fearful; nor did fighting make him feel he was acting like his father.

In the fields of Nockmaar he heard distant rumblings of volcanoes, and of trouble. He saw River Troon, a cesspool of Nockmaar's waste. Sick at heart and struck with concern for his home, he journeyed back across the wilderness. It had been years since he left Nelwyn Valley, and his mission to find Tir Asleen had failed.

A bad winter delayed his return to the valley. Trapped by a blizzard in a hillside cave north of Nelwyn Valley, he

shivered with cold and hunger. Numbness crept inward from his toes and fingertips, and he sensed a warmth that he knew was illusion. He felt sleepy.

His last memory recalled his father's words: "I died tomorrow, not ten people would attend my funeral."

ANOTHER DREAM?

Vohnkar has told this story many times. "I felt a hand on my shoulder, shaking me awake," he says, "and I looked up. What I remember seeing first were those large eyes, beautiful green eyes. Pale skin. Silver hair as fine as down. Thin furs on a thin body, and fingertips fine as crow quills. So tall!"

"She spoke to me, saying, 'Your battle is not done, warrior. Come with me.' She had thin lips, delicate pink like a carnation, but I never saw them move."

His eyes glitter with the memory. "Two others appeared, just like her, but taller, with men's features and pointed beards. They wrapped me in furs and led me down a long passage. I can't remember what the tunnel looked like, or how long I walked. At the end they carried me.

"They gave me some wafers to eat. Delicious, with a kind of nut-bread taste, but more delicate. It filled me right up in three bites. I asked them about Tir Asleen, and they looked away. They couldn't take me there. But they did show me something else.

"We walked through more passages. I don't remember how far we went, or what directions, or anything; it's odd. Suddenly we faced a cave mouth looking out over a mountain range, under black clouds.

"I saw a red flame of lava from a volcano, and then they pointed out a building. It was huge and black, and I knew I was looking at Nockmaar Castle.

"They said, 'Evil times are approaching. The spirit of Tir Asleen, of peace and open hands, will be threatened. We who cherish that spirit must fight to protect it, wherever it survives. Return home, warrior, to do your part.'

"They gave me a token of faith in Tir Asleen," Vohnkar says, holding out his hand. "This silver ring. Then the woman spoke some words I didn't understand, and I got sleepy. I woke up, rested like I'd slept a year, in the same cavern where I'd fallen asleep, but with furs and food piled around me."

Was Vohnkar in truth rescued by the legendary elves? Perhaps; and perhaps not. Though no one doubts Vohnkar's sincerity, his meeting occurred after he had fasted for several days, and his story resembles a dream or vision.

Vohnkar wondered at the meaning of this visitation. He tells of standing at the cave's mouth, ring in hand, pondering how he could "do his part" to fight Bavmorda. In all his travels, he had not found Tir Asleen. How could he protect its spirit?

Looking out on the blizzard, he knew he could have died. Seeing the snowy hills, he thought, "I still could." Awareness of his mortality struck him like a winter blast, and in his warm furs he shook with sudden chill.



RETURN TO DUTY

As Vohnkar journeyed home, he thought of his rescuers' words. He had avoided villages on his trip north, three years before, but now he stopped in every one he found. Townspeople flocked to hear the stories of his travels. Though Nelwyns are usually sedentary, hating travel, they delight to hear about foreign climes.

In turn, they told him of recent troubles. Giant bandits, driven away from Daikini towns when Nockmaar's army took all the loot for itself, passed through the valley. Warriors kept them moving south.

Vohnkar crossed the foothills. Then, under a spring sky of robin's-egg blue, with the sun high and the breeze uncommonly fresh, Vohnkar stood on a hillside and saw he had come home.

His village stretched to the edge of River Freen, where a bend in its course shielded and caressed the land. Busy villagers ran in and out of their homes like bees falling away from a hive. They plowed fields, loosing the aroma of freshly turned earth on the wind. On the riverbank fishermen cast out lines and pulled in fish. Birds sang, and even the blooms of the trees seemed to burst forth with the vigor of the season.

Vohnkar walked down the hillside. He saw familiar landmarks: the High Aldwin's home, huts of childhood friends, and the Ageless Oak, oldest tree in the valley.

Remembering the dangers he'd seen and heard of, Vohnkar felt an unexpected fear clutch his heart. The idea that all these buildings could be burned, the people enslaved or worse, was more than he could grasp. But he knew some stood ready to protect what they loved.

In the village streets Nelwyns saw him, shouted, rushed to welcome him back. He shook his elders' hands, hugged his childhood friends, lifted and kissed the children. By the time he reached the village square, Vohnkar walked at the center of a growing crowd. There he met the Aldwin.

"How good to see you've come back safely, my boy—er, young man," the Aldwin said. "You must be tired. What may we do for you?"

Vohnkar said, "I've come back to be a soldier. And I think I'll never leave again."

The crowd gave a deafening cheer. And that night Vohnkar slept the soundest sleep he'd ever known.

VOHNKAR AND HIS SOLDIERS

Protecting the village proved tougher than usual in the following years. A Death Dog, searching for the baby, tore apart the Nelwyns' fair before they managed to kill it; Vohnkar delivered the death blow.

Then he and his soldiers escorted Willow and his party to the Daikini crossroads. The journey was more dangerous than Vohnkar's travels, and the soldiers often had to drive off wild animals and evade Nockmaar troops.

At the crossroads Vohnkar wanted to stay with Willow and Meegosh while they searched for a suitable Daikini to take Elora. But Prefect Burglekutt made that impossible. Vohnkar had to obey the official's orders to return home, because above all he is a good soldier.

GAMING NOTES

5th skill-level halfling fighter

Strength: 9	Dexterity: 14
Constitution: 13	Wisdom: 10
Intelligence: 11	Charisma: 13
Hits: 25	

SKILLS

Vohnkar is skilled with spears, knives, and most other weapons used by Nelwyns (but not bows or heavy polearms). He has travelled widely and can survive and find his way in the wilderness. He is fairly good at leading soldiers, though the Nelwyn village has not given him much chance to hone his skills.

EQUIPMENT

Spear, dagger, leather armor. Flint and steel, other camping items as appropriate. Vohnkar always wears his silver ring. It is not magical.

L LUG

"Charming fellow."

—Madmartigan



Llug is big. He weighed thirteen pounds at birth, 130 at age ten, and may reach 1,300 if he lives long enough. In his teens he grew as big as any man reasonably needs to be, and then he kept going. Now when he holds a beer mug, his thumb and fingers meet around the far side. He goes through doors sideways. Horses dread him.

Llug is strong. He got drafted into the Nockmaar city guard when a guard captain saw him twist an opponent's head off. He got discharged shortly thereafter for the same reason.

Llug likes women. (Flowers like sunshine, people like food and air, salmon like to swim upstream to spawn, and Llug likes women.) He's not good at subtle seduction—his standard gambit is "Wanna breeeeeed?" But he enjoys success with his direct approach: If a woman rejects him, he sits on her until she doesn't.

Llug is married. He had to sit on his fiancée for three hours before she accepted his proposal. Married or not, though, he sees nothing wrong if he sits on someone else now and then.

But he doesn't allow his wife the same privilege: "Wife oughter sit home with the young'uns an' cook," he once said, in a moment of eloquence. When Llug discovered Madmartigan (disguised as a woman) in a liaison with Llug's wife in the tavern, Madmartigan chose a wild-horse chase, pursued by Sorsha and the war chariots of Nockmaar, over a session with the vengeful husband. He made the right choice.

Llug works in a stable, where he grooms the horses. It's fair to say that there he dwells among his intellectual peers.

Though Llug isn't much brighter than two rocks banged together, his real weakness is his eyes. Due to extreme nearsightedness, he makes advances on women whom (if he

had better eyesight) he would consider plain-looking. He can hardly see their faces, and tends to choose new conquests according to a slightly lower portion of their bodies. Thus his attentions to Madmartigan, whom he viewed (in his blurry way) as a buxom and presumably pretty wench.

His weak eyes put him at a disadvantage in a fistfight. His usual tactic is to bear his opponent to the ground, sit on him, root around until he finds the victim's head, and twist it off. So far this has worked fine.

GAMING NOTES

5th skill-level fighter

Strength: 18	Dexterity: 8
Constitution: 18	Wisdom: 7
Intelligence: 4	Charisma: 4
Hits: 35	

SKILLS

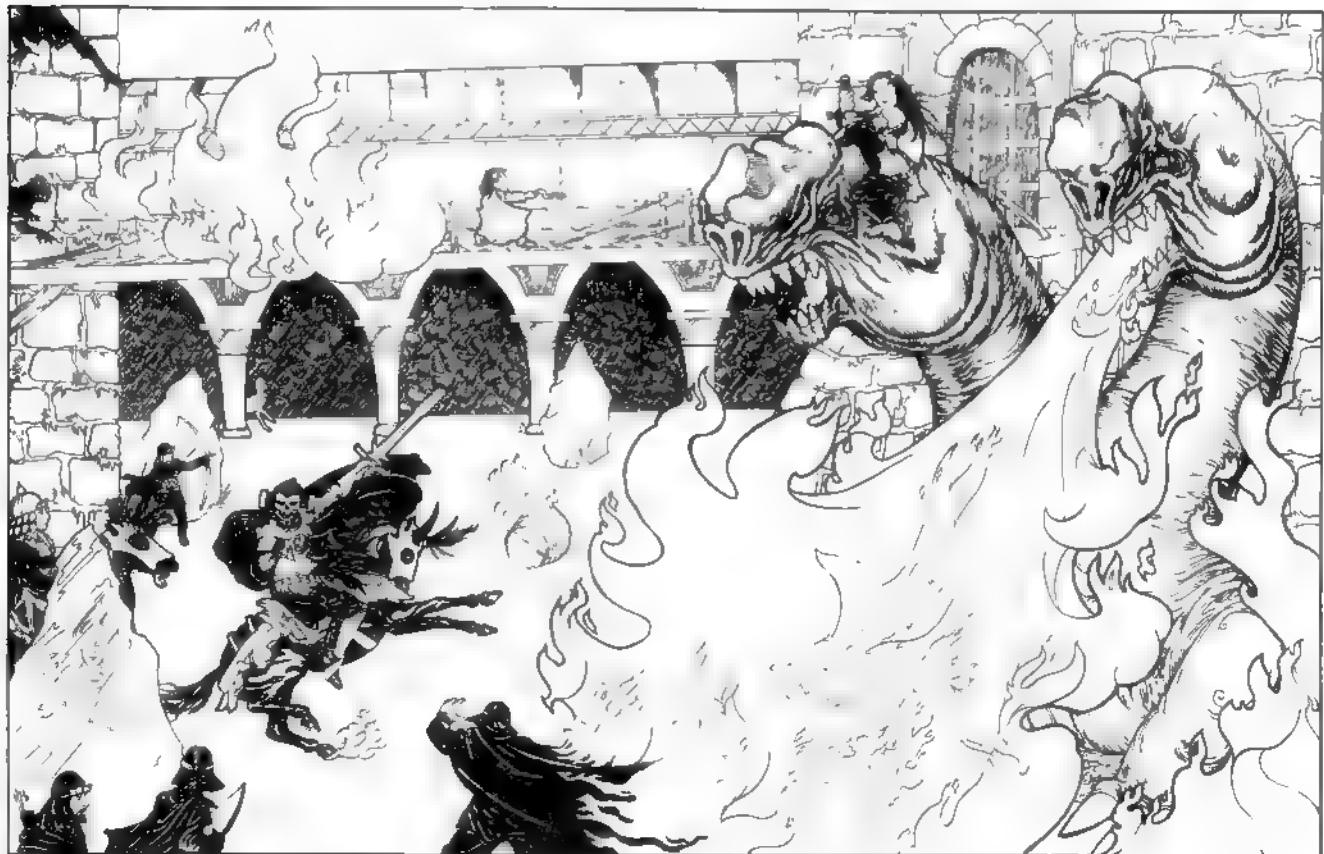
Stable-keeping, brawling, womanizing, twisting off heads.

EQUIPMENT

None needed.

HUMANS & OTHERWISE

In Willow's world, many races, monsters, and factions coexist... sometimes in harmony, but you can never take that for granted. To aid the traveller through the wilderness, here is a selection of dwellers on less-travelled routes.



NELWYNS

"An unexpectedly reliable folk."

—Fin Raziel



T

The Nelwyns are an old race of mysterious origins, now found only in Nelwyn Valley. The Daikinis of the world often overlook them, and that suits the Nelwyns fine.

A typical adult Nelwyn is about three feet ten inches tall and weighs perhaps ninety pounds. A single population may vary widely in height, build, and even skin color. Details of Nelwyn biology, such as gestation, birth, onset of maturity, and lifespan all match human norms fairly closely.

Nelwyns are seldom stronger than Daikini boys aged ten to twelve. But they tend to be bright and articulate, and many excel in matters of craftsmanship and dexterity, such as weaving, cooking, and archery. As might be expected of this small and timid race, they show a talent for staying out of sight of larger folk.

The nickname for Nelwyns, "Pecks," probably derives from their size, "peck" being a small unit of volume. The Nelwyns dislike the term.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Nelwyns moved into the valley that bears their name many years ago . . . 1,342 years ago, if their meticulous archival records tell the truth. The presumed date they first saw the valley is still celebrated in Nelwyn villages as Arrival Day.

The first settlers, known in Nelwyn folklore as the Forerunners, fled into the green valley from the north, to escape constant attacks by troll packs, cyclopes, dragons, and other monsters. In those times such creatures roamed freely, "in numbers that darkened the open plains," if we may believe the Nelwyn chroniclers. They may be forgiven some dramatic enlargement on the facts: to a Nelwyn, even one dragon might seem to darken the open plain.

Elves lived in the valley at that time, according to the records. The tall folk and little folk got along well, the ones dwelling in the forests and the others fishing on the river. Their peaceful coexistence lasted for several centuries, until the elves mysteriously departed this part of the world.

Life continued peacefully for the Nelwyns after the elves left. Along the winding rivers Troon and Freen, and on the shores of many ponds and oxbow lakes, dozens of villages sprang up. They prospered so well that the surrounding

kingdoms began to name the area "Nelwyn Valley" on their maps.

But Daikinis left them alone for the most part, since the valley was too remote to exploit efficiently—and since the Nelwyns proved willing to defend their homes fiercely. A few bandit incursions proved that. After word spread that the little people showed unusual skill with bow and knife, Daikinis of evil intent gave the valley a wide berth.

THE MINES

The first great change in valley life came with the discovery of copper, about a century ago. The mines, communally owned, now run deep under the hills by the villages, a steady but not especially rich source of metal for cooking pots, primitive water pipes, and coin metal.

Miners are considered respectable tradesmen, and in Willow's village they carry on a sporting rivalry with the farmers. At the festivals one of the hallmark events is the tug-of-war between miners and farmers. The contest usually goes to the farmers, since Dollum Wheeloover (195 pounds last Midwinter Festival) alleges himself a farmer.

The miner's life is not pleasant, and many die prematurely in accidents or of lung diseases. When Burglekutt threatened Willow with a life in the mines, the Prefect's threat was chilling. The dangers are severe enough that some villagers advocate closing the mines. But villages need metals.

Whether the Nelwyns will continue their own mining is not yet clear. Certainly they will reduce production until the mines can be made safer.

THE VILLAGES

Most Nelwyn villages lie along River Freen, for Nelwyns prefer living by the water. They survive by farming (wheat and some vegetables), mining, fishing (trout, copperbacks, many others), and foraging. A couple of villages lie inland, concentrating on mining and terraced hill farming. These hamlets tend to be drab, inbred, and glum, in contrast to the bucolic cheerfulness of the rest.



An estimate of the valley's population is hard to come by. The Nelwyns themselves don't much care:

Child: "Gee, how many of us Pecks are there, Mister Aldwin, sir?"

Aldwin: "Don't say 'Pecks,' son, it's not polite. And who knows how many Nelwyns there are? Who needs to know? Might as well ask, 'How much do all the ravens in the world weigh?'"

Child: "Oh." [Long, pregnant pause.] "Say, how much do all the ravens in the world weigh?"

Aldwin: [Whack.]

wander abroad, such as Vohnkar, return with tales of a land built much too large for the Nelwyns. This discourages exploration, and the Nelwyns seem to enjoy their isolation anyway.

CULTURE

The anchor of Nelwyn society is the family of two parents and one to four children. Occasionally an enfeebled grandparent may live with the family. Inheritance is through the father, and offspring marry outside the family group.

Nelwyns number among the virtues hard work, the importance of the family, respect for elders, cleanliness, chastity, and tolerance for different ways of living. They consider the opposites of these traits to be vices, along with cavalier or antisocial behavior, gambling, refusal to observe festival customs, and the traditional iniquities condemned in human societies.

There is no formal education. Once each week a village Aldwin sets aside an afternoon to instruct youngsters in the village's history and traditions. Perhaps he may pull out an old primer and teach reading or a little arithmetic. But instruction in book learning is the parents' job. Most Nelwyns, like Willow and his family, are literate.

Many are superstitious (unlike Willow). Many Nelwyns thrive on a rich oral tradition of omens, cautions, and advice that would make any Daikini a nervous wreck. Every Nelwyn child knows which way to nod before crossing a bridge, a dozen ways to fend off mosquitoes, three dozen to cure hiccups, and what happens if a farmer keeps two hogs of exactly the same color. Kiaya gave Willow a braid of her hair as a good-luck charm, following yet another old practice. Like the children's rhymes that Meegosh studies, few of these wives' tales have been preserved in the archives. Evidently there is a superstition against that.

Weaving, carpentry, and all the usual crafts found in human villages have their Nelwyn equivalents. More interesting are the Nelwyn folk arts, which are well developed and spring from long tradition. For instance, nearly every child learns to draw and paint on wooden slats, and many continue artistic pursuits through life. (Willow's daughter, Mims, has already shown talent for illustration.)

In every village archives, examples abound of myths, legends, fables, ballads, and even jokes and riddles. One traditional comic tale tells of a hog farmer who lazily lets his homestead run down, until the hogs take over and put him in harness. This moral tale and many like it exist in numberless versions.

The Nelwyn literature includes no drama except for children's puppet shows. But the village festivals show a high awareness of theater. Stage magicians, masters of legerdemain, can rise to prominence in the valley (though Willow never approached that level). Bards and balladeers draw crowds, as do puppeteers.

Music enlivens every festival and, on wintry evenings, nearly every home. Songs outnumber Nelwyns by a hundred to one in the valley. A given Nelwyn is as likely as not to play reed pipes (like Willow's friend Meegosh), or some kind of

LIFE IN THE VILLAGES

Though no one in a Nelwyn village can be called filthy rich, some citizens live in greater comfort than the rest—market owners, the archivist, tradesmen such as the blacksmith or the undertaker, successful farmers who have relocated into town, and sometimes the Prefect. Warriors do not have high status, as a rule.

The upper class enjoys better food and roomier huts than the norm. But all of them still work until they're old or feeble, and they consort on roughly equal terms with the rest of the village.

A village's Aldwin always enjoys high status, but seldom lives in commensurate comfort. Because Aldwins like to dabble in magical research, their dwellings often exhibit weird lights or burning odors, and more than one has exploded. Therefore, the Aldwin's hut is near the edge of town, away from other buildings, and often looks like it was thrown together in a hurry.

Village government is nearly always a loose, low-key affair. Yes, there are council members (the number varies among villages), they serve staggered terms of a few years each (again, the number varies), and they are elected by popular vote. They hear the occasional legal dispute, and they appoint the Prefect and the archivist.

But Nelwyns are not political animals. They are tolerant, and creatures of habit; there's rarely a need for the council to do anything. When there is, the villagers will likely call a town meeting and arrive at a majority decision. Then the council presides and exerts influence, but has no real authority. A council seat bestows status, but little power.

Suffrage is granted to men and women "of mature years," as the Nelwyns phrase it. This seems to mean you can vote if you go up to the ballot bowls and nobody shoos you away. Voting is theoretically by secret ballot, but in practice, each citizen's choice is public knowledge. That is life in a small village.

Nelwyn males and females are nearly equal in number. Customarily, men head the household and work in the hard-labor occupations such as mining, while women do domestic chores and work in less physical professions. Exceptions are not uncommon; Nelwyns do not get excited about these matters.

Village councils are typically three-quarters male. Aldwins can be either male or female. Some say that women usually achieve greater mastery of magic.

In general the Nelwyns dislike travel. Those few who



drum or woodblock, or one of many primitive stringed instruments.

The joy the Nelwyns take in dance can infect even jaded Daikini onlookers. Leontes the Traveller came upon a Nelwyn festival in his wanderings, and the villagers invited him to their dance. "Wondrous indeed, to view these whistlings cavorting to strong rhythms," he says. "I felt moved to join the celebrants, much as a hale veteran may fall to the infant's shaking-sickness."

"The Nelwyns withdrew from around me, I doubt not because of my bulk, yet they lauded me and laughed, gaily. I gamboled among them far into the night, as I later learned their dances are wont to extend. Next morning I also had occasion to use their worthy salves for the ache of joints."

THE NELWYN YEAR

The villagers work hard, and have little time for holidays. So the few festivals in the year have become all the more important.

Nelwyns begin their calendar with the Midwinter Festival, three days marked by snow and good spirits. Families invite friends to their homes, and bestow gifts on each guest as he or she arrives. Songs and ornaments mark the holiday.

In spring comes planting, and also—as a reward for all that effort—the Planting Festival. This great fair features sporting contests, stage presentations, much music, and lots of food and activities. The villagers bring out the Wickerman, the woven thatch sculpture that symbolizes the Nelwyn way of life. Seeds and vegetables are placed at its base, and the Nelwyns hope for rain.

This year's festival was disrupted by a Death Dog searching for Elora Danan, and the Wickerman was destroyed. But with the fall of Bavmorda, prospects for next year's celebration look bright.

Midsummer is the traditional time for weddings. There is nearly always a young couple ready to wed; sometimes an older couple wishes to renew their vows. Weddings are always festive occasions; villagers bring food and gifts to the

couple, and the men help the groom build their new home. The bride traditionally braids her hair at this time.

Arrival Day, in late summer before the harvest, is a quiet holiday. Villagers observe it with a council meeting. The Aldwin ritually recounts the village's history, and families retire to their homes for a large dinner.

After harvest comes Leaf-Turning Festival, another fair much like that of Planting. Traditionally the Wickerman is burned at this time. Elderly widows and spinsters spend the winter weaving a new Wickerman, and it is brought out in its turn next spring. For many Nelwyns it marks the year more effectively than the changing of the leaves.

GAMING NOTES

Typical Nelwyn male

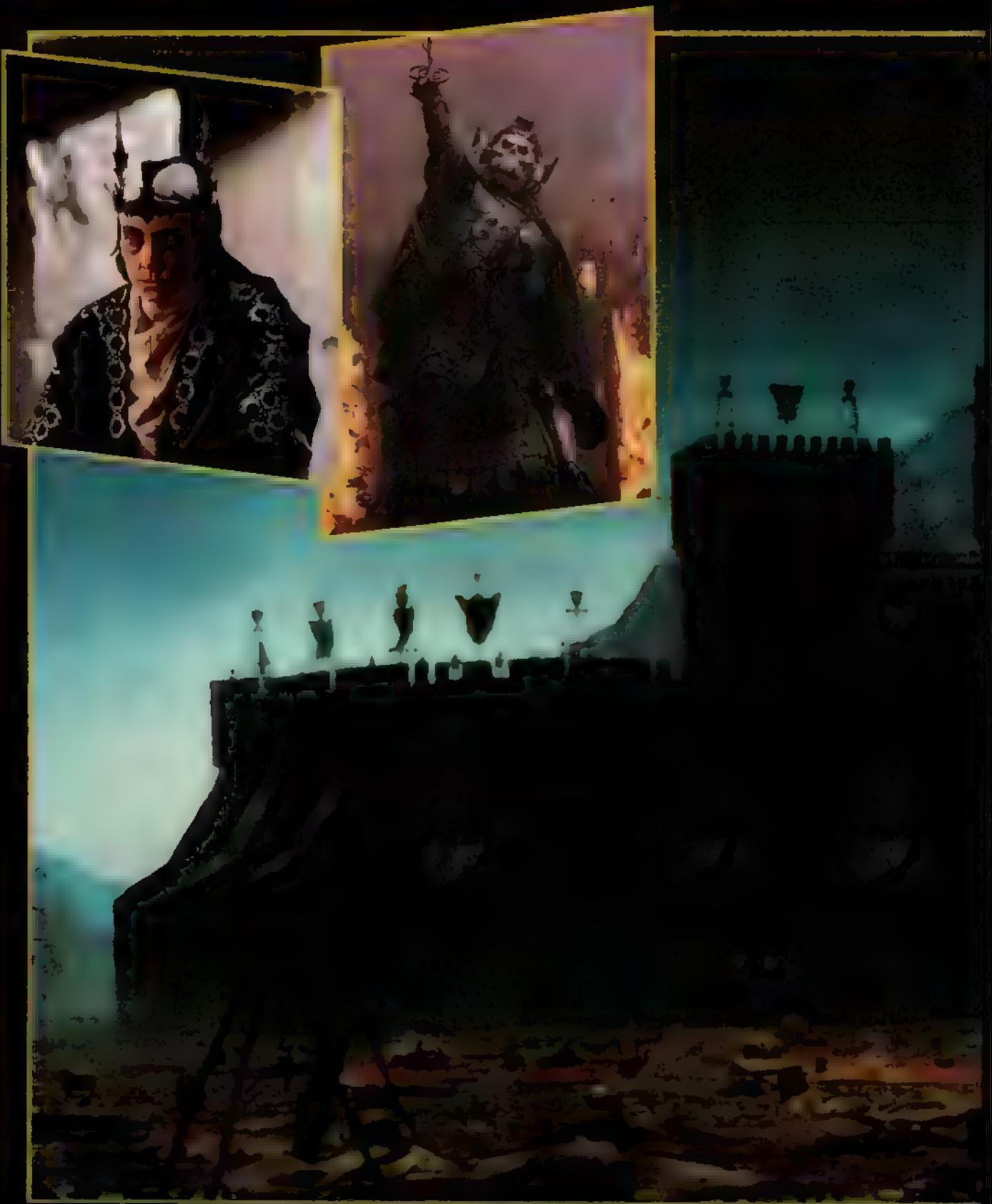
Strength: 6-8 (2d6)	Dexterity: 11-13 (3d6+1)
Constitution: 9-11 (3d6-1)	Wisdom: 10-12 (3d6)
Intelligence: 11-13 (3d6+1)	Charisma: 6-8 (2d6)
Hits: 6-8 (2d6 + 1d6 per level)	

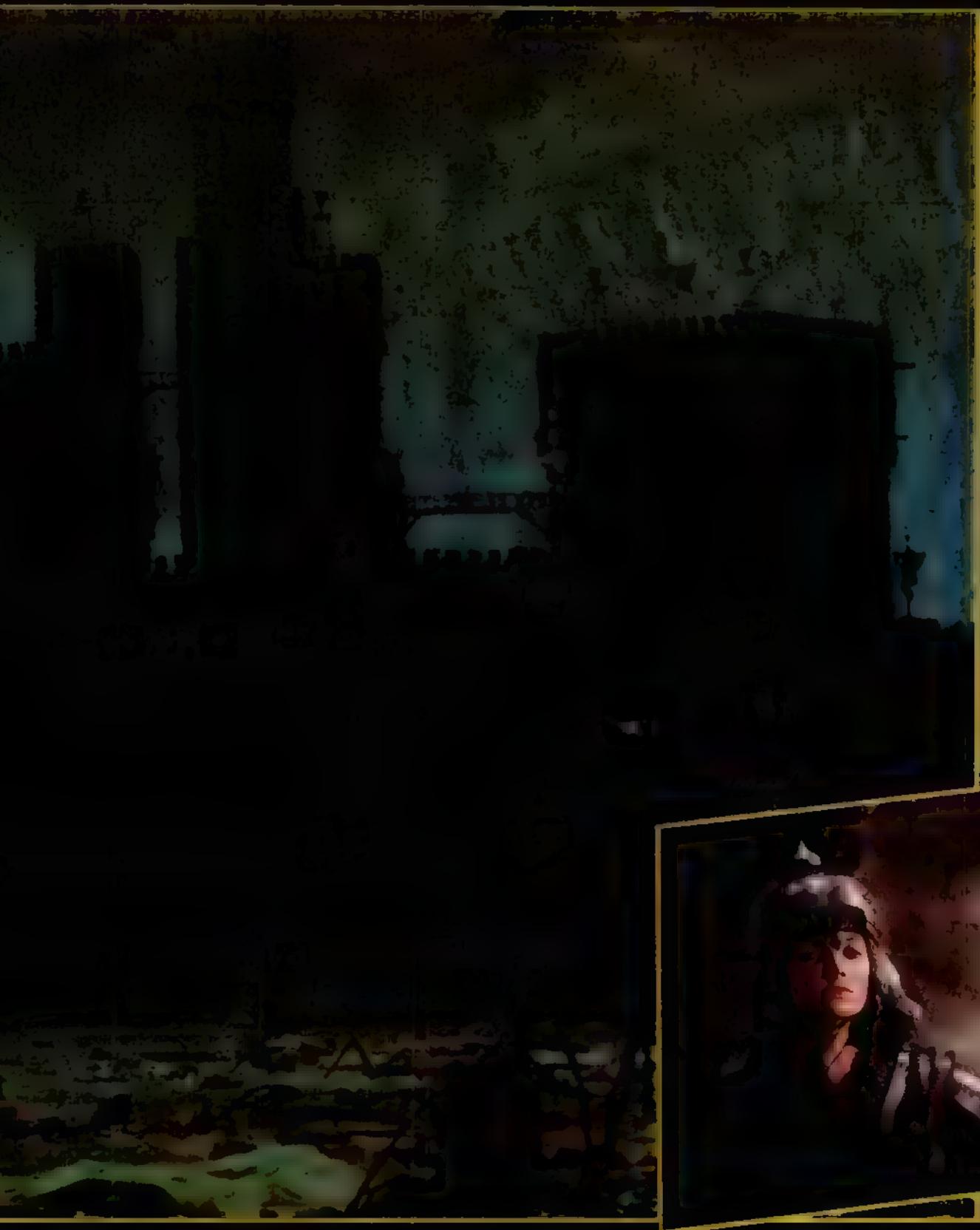
Numbers given are ranges; die rolls follow each attribute, to allow players to generate Nelwyn characters.

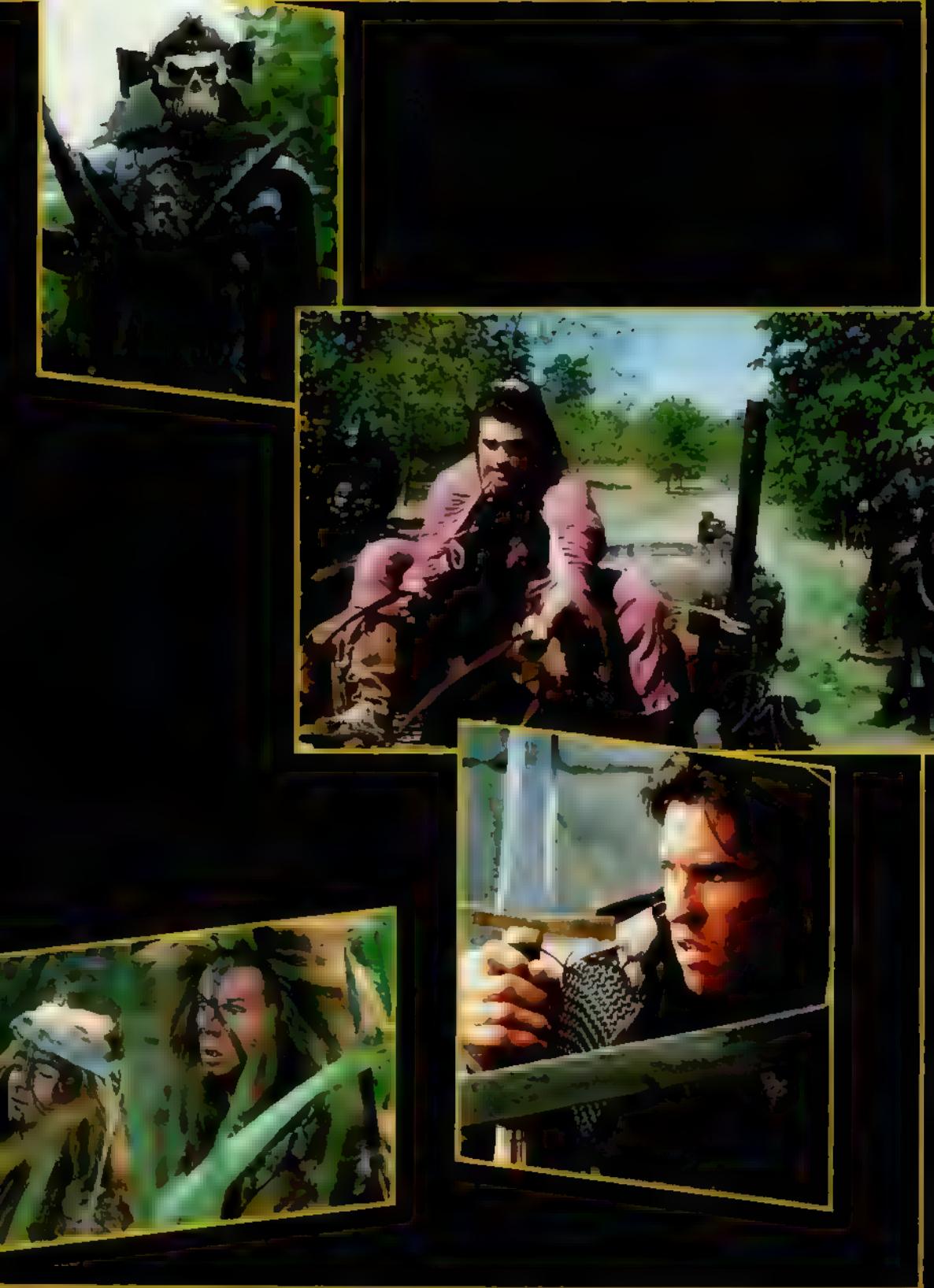
For females, subtract 1 from strength and add it to constitution. For children, subtract 3 from all statistics (minimum 3) except dexterity, which is unaffected.

In many roleplaying systems Nelwyns most closely resemble halflings. They lack the thief skills sometimes assigned to halflings, but are stealthy and good climbers. And, as Willow and the High Aldwin demonstrate, their mastery of magic can equal a Daikini's. Otherwise, base game decisions on halfling rules.

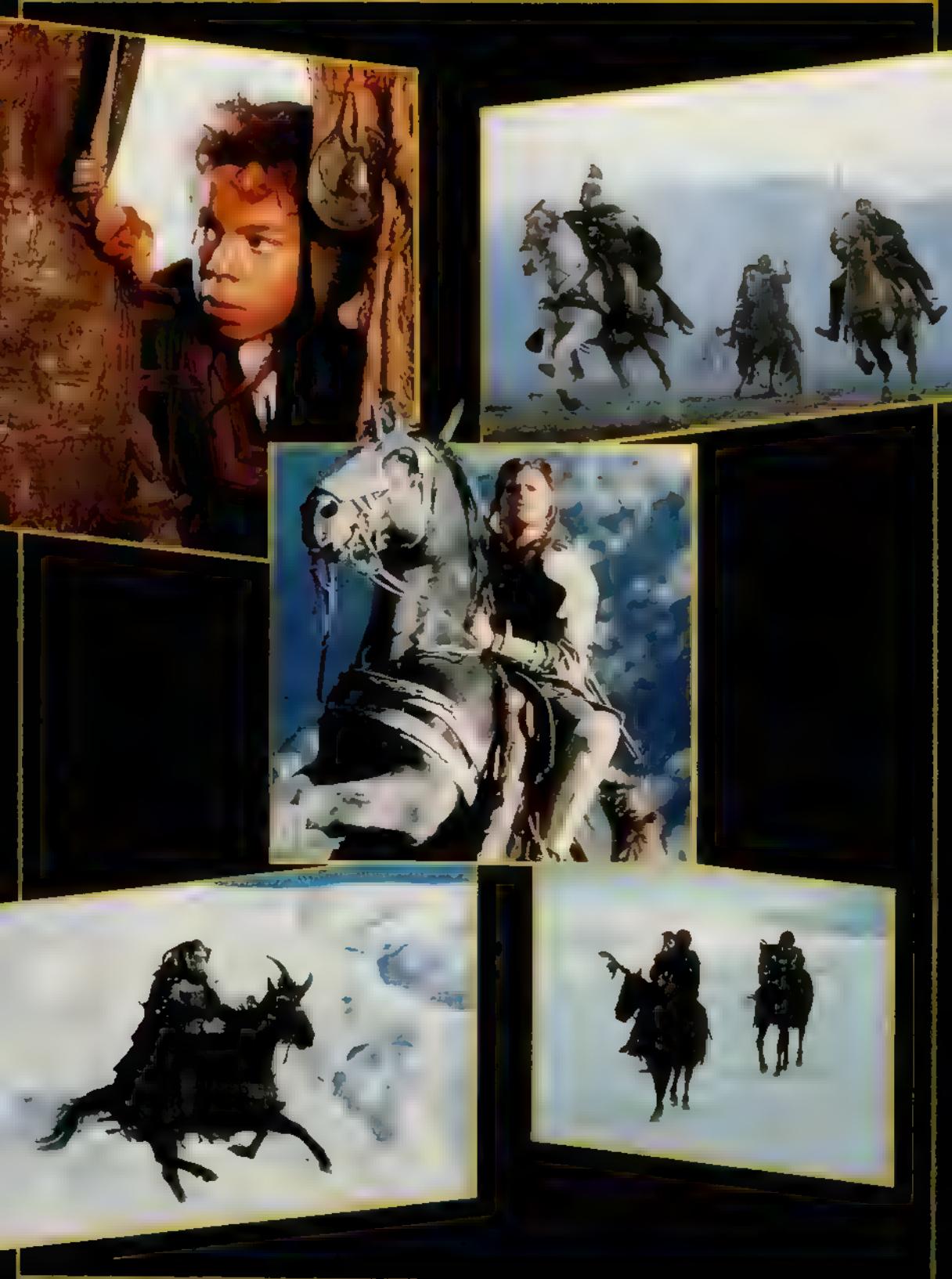


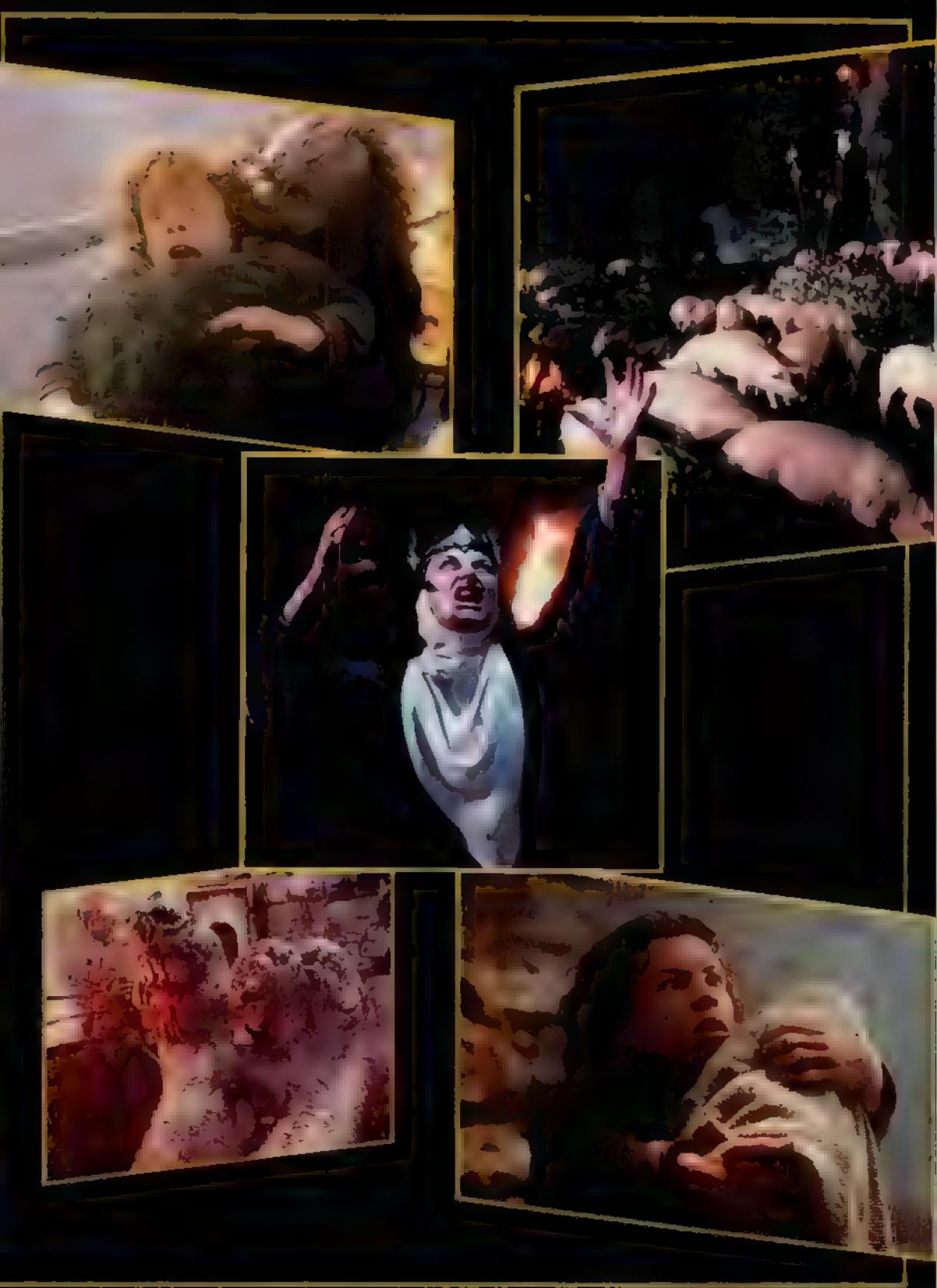














THE KNIGHTS OF GALLADOORN

"Idiots! By now you should have crushed them three times over!"

—Bavmorda (to her minions)



Hounded by the minions of Nockmaar and their Death Dogs, tracked by a hundred hidden messengers, hunted, besieged, blockaded, assailed, encircled, and outnumbered 15 to 1, the knights of Galladoorn endured.

They lacked horses, arrows, food, fresh water, and safe shelter. But they endured, for the oath of knighthood says, "I shall fight injustice with all my strength, nor falter if my strength fails before my life departs me."

They moved endlessly, exhaustingly, with Kael's minions never far behind. Airk Thaughaer, their commander, could not afford direct confrontation with Nockmaar. The knights had no hope of allies, of victory, even of survival. Yet they endured.

They felt—not sorrow, but mature resignation, a lightness of spirit that made them more dangerous in battle. For the oath of knighthood says, "Through direst peril, of body or of spirit, I shall hold true."

Their strength baffled Queen Bavmorda and astonished General Kael. No wonder; for the source of that strength was unknown to Nockmaar. The oath of knighthood says, "Always will I come when my fellow knights call. Every knight is my brother; the cause of one is the cause of all."

Even in desperation, they remained true to their nickname—the Shining Legion.

ORGANIZATION

Galladoorn, like most of the kingdoms of the world prior to Bavmorda's ascent, had no standing army. The knights of Galladoorn, the cream of its fighting forces, were a chivalric body—warriors to be sure, but serving often as peace officers, administrators, and circuit judges.

In time of war, each landed noble (many, but far from all, of the knights qualified as such) was bound by his oath of allegiance to arrive at Castle Galladoorn with horse and sword. Depending on the size of his lands, each was expected to supply also a body of trained "landsmen," yeomen trained in the arts of war. Such training varied greatly in quality; some nobles took their duties seriously, and trained their men weekly, while others hardly bothered.

In time of war, this mixed bag of nobles and yeomen, some well trained, others unable to tell one end of a spear

from another, would be taken in hand by the knights of Galladoorn. The knights would separate out the soldiers from the chaff, and send the latter home to their fields. The remainder would be drilled and formed into formal units—files of a dozen men, each commanded by a knight; companies consisting of a dozen files. Organization above the company level was rare, but in major battles, companies were organized into *battles* (sometimes "battalions") of anything up to 2,000 men, each under the command of one of Galladoorn's greatest notables.

THE KNIGHTS' ROLE

There were rarely more than a few hundred knights at any time. While Bavmorda built up Nockmaar's army, Galladoorn made every effort to increase knightly training—but at its height, the knights of Galladoorn numbered fewer than a thousand. The Army of Galladoorn, before the fall of Castle Galladoorn, numbered 6,000 men and slightly more than 1,000 horses; in addition to the knights, it contained much of Galladoorn's nobility, and many of its yeomen. It was the largest army the nation ever fielded . . . but it was not large enough.

The Shining Legion suffered awful defeats in battle at Land's End (see MADMARTIGAN) and at Castle Galladoorn (see AIRK THAUGHAER). Its remnants, led by Airk, withstood hardships unprecedented in their history.

Defeat looked inevitable, until Elora arrived.

When Airk, their leader, decided to pursue Willow and Madmartigan to Tir Asleen, they had little trouble following the Nockmaar army's trail through the canyon maze. The knights arrived just in time to rescue Willow and his friends from the Nockmaar assault—though the Eborsk helped.

Airk's knights helped even more at Nockmaar Castle, when Willow's ploy got them inside the castle walls. While they kept Nockmaar's soldiers busy, Sorsha led Raziel and Willow to the tower, just in time to rescue Elora from Bavmorda's Ritual of Obliteration.

With Bavmorda's fall, the knights of Galladoorn face an awesome task. They have resolved to rebuild Castle Galladoorn, and are recruiting new applicants to succeed the fallen heroes. The Shining Legion has reinstated Madmartigan with honor, and Willow Ufgood is now an



honorary member. (They waived the height requirements.)

But the knights drew the line at Franjean and Rool. Brownies are not looked upon kindly by most Daikinis, a prejudice the knights might have overlooked—but the two brownies went through their camp one night and filled everyone's empty boots with cooking oil.

"It was just a little joke," Franjean said. "Stupid Daikinis! We didn't want to be knights anyway, did we, Rool?"

Rool said, "If they're called knights, why are they out in the daytime?"

GAMING NOTES

5th skill-level fighters

Strength: 12	Dexterity: 12
Constitution: 13	Wisdom: 11
Intelligence: 11	Charisma: 10
Hits: 17-27 (15+2d6)	

SKILLS

Swordsmanship, archery, and other appropriate weapon skills, combat tactics, riding, chivalric and courtly skills.

POSSESSIONS

Weapon, shield (only with one-handed weapons), leather or chain armor, dagger, bedroll (often improvised), flint and steel, sharpening stone. Cavalry have horses, saddle and gear, and cleaning tools.

MINIONS OF NOCKMAAR

"Nockmaar scum."

—Madmartigan



Nockmaar had no army before Queen Bavmorda assumed control. Through her magic, and by her strength of will, she transformed the land from a forested wilderness into a war machine. Villages, scattered at the forest's edge and along River Troon, became slave-labor camps; mines pitted the hillsides and polluted the river; forests were cleared for bivouacs, their trees turned into tent poles and war chariots.

Bavmorda drafted every able-bodied man to serve her dream of conquest. Her press gangs roamed the trade routes, pulling every young man into service. She turned thieves, thugs, and assassins out of the jails, imposing military servitude on them that was only slightly less confining. Once her army began its conquests, its ranks swelled with captured soldiers from the vanquished side.

There were even volunteers. A soldier who enlisted in Bavmorda's army needed no identity papers; in fact, they were prohibited. His past was kept secret. So the Nockmaar army became a haven for felons, deserters, husbands fleeing their families, and anyone whose crimes were horrible enough to merit exile from his home.

No individuality was allowed. As in any army, all soldiers ate together and slept in common barracks. They wore helmets that covered the face and muffled the voice. Commanders stressed obedience and teamwork, as in any army.

But in Nockmaar's army, conditioning went deeper. Every recruit learned this oath by heart: "The army is all. The army is the father, the mother, the family. There is nothing but the army. The army is here. [The soldier struck his chest.] The army is here. [The soldier held up a fist.]



Fight for the army. Kill for the army. Win for the army. The army is all."

The recruit screamed this oath a dozen times a day, at meals and exercises. Officers woke soldiers from sleep and had them shout it. After each repetition, commanders showed a straw dummy of an enemy trooper and trained the soldiers either to scream hatefully at it or, more often, to kick and stab the dummy with any weapon at hand.

A soldier's basic training ended with a two-day marathon hike, with a full load, little food, and no sleep. Soldiers who fell by the wayside were whipped mercilessly and sent through training again.

At the end of the march, the dazed survivors shouted the army's oath. Then the commanders brought out living prisoners of war, unarmed and helpless. The Nockmaar soldiers attacked the prisoners with rabid hatred, customarily leaving no body parts intact. Anyone showing mercy was sent back to training. Those who showed true ferocity graduated, becoming minions of Nockmaar.

THE ARMY'S ORGANIZATION

The Army of Nockmaar was far more regimented than Airk Thaughbaer's knights of Galladoorn. The basic unit was the six-man squad. Five squads formed a platoon; two platoons a company; and three companies a battalion of 200 soldiers. Four battalions made up a regiment (800 men), and three regiments a division. At the height of Nockmaar's power, Kael commanded four divisions of infantry, cavalry, archers, and charioteers against Galladoorn alone. The entire Nockmaar army included perhaps 15,000 men.

The Army of Nockmaar was also better disciplined than the knights, at least in one sense. "Discipline," defined as unthinking obedience to orders and unanimous hatred of the enemy, flourished in the Nockmaar army. But the troops lacked ideology, and though slavishly obedient to Bavmorda, they had no great loyalty to her—only to her army. Their discipline was that of ants in a hill.

NOCKMAAR WHIP-KNIVES AND WAR CHARIOTS

When Madmartigan and Willow fled from the tavern, the minions of Nockmaar followed them. One rode in a fearsome Nockmaar war chariot.

Drawn by two to six warhorses, a chariot can carry up to four warriors and attain speeds of twenty to twenty-five miles an hour. Sharp blades are sometimes mounted on its frame, though never when it is ridden among other Nockmaar troops. The horses are trained to leap over prone soldiers in their path, so the chariot can run over victims with its iron-shod wheels.

This vehicle was invented for the Nockmaar army

shortly after Bavmorda seized power, though it is unlikely Bavmorda herself created it. The sorceress-queen never showed a mechanical turn of mind. But her underlings proved ingenious in creating new weapons of death and destruction, such as the whip-knife.

This deadly weapon is a heavy four-pointed steel star, the points sharpened to a razor edge. It rests in a long loop of leather edged with steel. The user whirls the loop around, then gives it a snap that sends the star whirling toward the target. The weapon is used only at a distance, never in confined quarters.

The whip-knife requires great skill, but can be fatal at close range. Most Nockmaar soldiers receive basic training in its use. A few, perhaps three or four in every company, achieve mastery. They become artillery troops, useful in cavalry units when a bow or crossbow would be too clumsy.

GAMING NOTES

2nd skill-level (infantry) or 6th skill-level (officer) fighter

Strength: 12	Dexterity: 12
Constitution: 12	Wisdom: 8
Intelligence: 10	Charisma: 7
Hits: 11–16 (10+1d6)	

SKILLS

Sword, bow, whip-knife, or other weapon; cavalry units know horsemanship; other skills appropriate to function in army, always at low level. Whip-knife users have dexterities of 15.

THE WHIP-KNIFE

Users must have a dexterity of 15 or higher and train intensively for two to four months. The whip-knife requires a dexterity check to throw successfully, and the gamemaster may assess penalties for range or confined spaces. Failure means another dexterity check, unmodified; if this one also fails, the wielder takes 2d6 damage.

A successful dexterity check allows the wielder to make an ordinary to-hit roll against the target, modified by range. The whip-knife's maximum range is the same as a sling's. If your game doesn't include slings, use the range for a throwing star (sha-ken) or short bow.

The wielder takes a -1 penalty to the to-hit roll for each full 10% of this distance to the target. For example, if the target is at 40% of the maximum range, the attacker takes -4 to the to-hit roll. If the target is at less than 10% of maximum range, there is no subtraction.

If the whip-knife hits, the target takes 6d6 damage, modified by range. For each full 10% of maximum range to



the target, roll one less die for damage (minimum damage, 1d6). In the example above (target at 40% of maximum range), the whip-knife's damage would be (6d6 - 4d6=) 2d6.

THE WAR CHARIOT

SPEED

Equal to the fastest coach in your campaign.

ARMOR

When a rider in the chariot is attacked from outside it, roll 1d6. On a 1, the chariot is hit instead of the rider. Three hits on a side of the chariot destroy that side (either left or right), and it gives no further protection.

DAMAGE

Running over a prone target inflicts 5d6 damage.

FAIRIES

"They have no sense of responsibility. None. Infuriating!"

—Bavmorda



F

airy" is a human-invented corruption of *fayarafallia*, or "happy folk," a name the fairies gave themselves. This fact intrigues scholars, for the *fayara*, or "fey folk," evidently have no language of their own. Only a few *fayara* even talk, though no human knows whether the others lack vocal chords or they simply have nothing to say. The fey "language" is only a small collection of words without grammar or syntax.

Where, then, did the words come from in the first place? The dubious source Axanderan of Cashmere, in his brief monograph *The Whole History of Our Realm, Its Beings, and All Its Kingdoms*, claims the fey language is a remnant of the tongue of the elves, the vanished predecessors of humanity. Other scholars claim more plausibly that the *fayara* had a language of their own at one time, but forgot it.

This is the nature of the happy folk: immortality and forgetfulness. They are old beyond human recollection, but most have no memory reaching beyond a year in the past. A fairy lives in an eternal present, reinventing the same games endlessly, exploring her forest with a child's wonder, unhaunted by memories of past sorrows.

Without fear of death, without responsibility, no wonder they are childlike. No wonder they are the "happy folk."

THE HIGH FEY

Fayara live only in forests occupied by "high fey," such as Cherlindrea. The high fey are thought to be elemental spirits, embodying the collective life force of an entire wood (see CHERLINDREA).

Ordinary *fayara* can fly, turn invisible at will, talk with animals—if they talk at all—and glow brightly in darkness. The high fey harness much greater magic, gathered from their subjects and from the life essence of the forest. Within this realm a fey ruler's power is practically absolute.

As with other "elemental" magicians, though, the price of this enormous magic is confinement to the place of magic. Some nonhuman creatures attain power that dwarfs a human sorcerer's abilities, but these beings may not leave the rock, sea, forest, or other terrain that gives them life. The high fey cannot range beyond the tree shadows at forest's edge.

No one is sure whether the same restriction applies to ordinary *fayara*. At any rate, the fairies show no interest in leaving the forest.

WILLOW

FOREST LIFE

Though not all forests host *sayara*, all *sayara* live in forests. They eat nothing, drink nothing, coexist peacefully with animals, sleep only occasionally; awake, they do little but play. Except for the high fey, no fairy shows interest in visiting other forests, learning of other races, having (or being) a pet, or gaining magical power. Experienced travellers know that a *sayara*'s only real interest is making mischief.

A human entering a fairy forest must beware of hanging vines, suspiciously wide paths, and other traps. The happy folk and their brownies set these snares to catch "the big folk." The captors always release their prey unharmed, but not before the prisoners are subjected to unmerciful pinching, tickling, and curious investigation. Those who recount the experience regularly use the phrase "blasted nuisance."

Fairy forests cannot be distinguished from the ordinary variety. The lights that flit from bush to branch often prove to be merely fireflies. But on nice days and clear summer nights the forest echoes with music: airy, fluting sounds, delicate yet resonant, that seem to carry with them the odors of flowers in bloom or fresh rainwater. The music has no melody, no clear beginning or end. Yet how many travellers stand transfixed, for hours at a time, drunk with the joy in those sounds!

FAIRY DUST

Fairies sometimes lose their wings. In cold climates at the onset of winter, a *sayara* often sheds its wings and hides away for a season-long sleep. By spring the fairy has grown an entire new set of wings. The happy folk preen and compare colors and patterns for many days after they awaken.

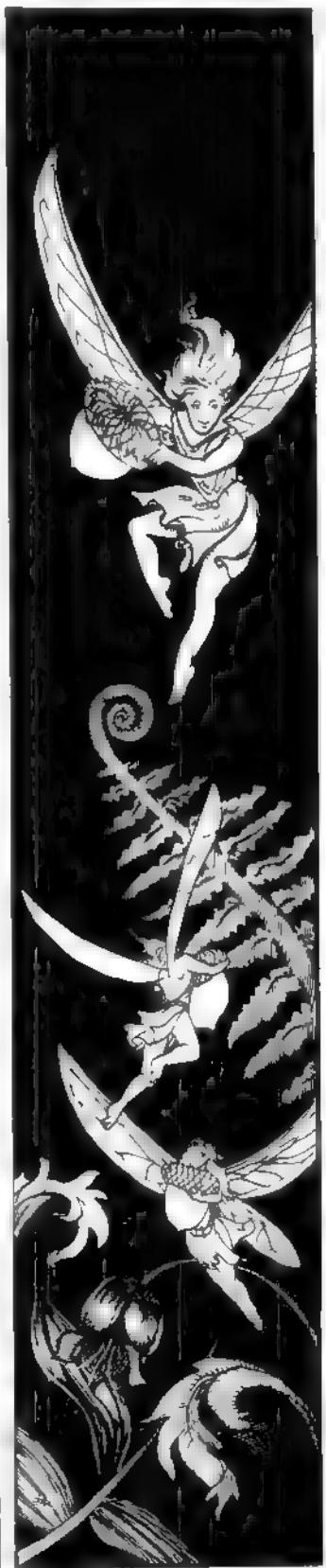
Brownies collect shed wings for the high fey. The rulers powder the wings and cast enchantments upon the dust, turning it into several types of "fairy dust." A pinch of this dust, cast into a living creature's face, provokes some strong emotion: happiness, sorrow, lovesickness, anger (see DUST OF BROKEN HEART).

Another variety of fairy dust can heal the wounds of any living creature. However, the effects are not instantaneous.

Though their bodies are extremely tough and can hardly be injured, *sayara* wings tear easily. A fairy that breaks or loses its wings can no longer fly. It retreats sadly into a hollow tree or burrow, staying out of sight for the month or more needed to regrow the wings. The only fairy dust that can be made from such broken wings is Dust of Lingering Sorrow.

GAMING NOTES

Armor Class: 0	Damage: Nil
Hits: 5	Alignment: Neutral
Move: 120'	Experience Value: 10
Attacks: None	





A fairy can fly, turn invisible or glow brightly at will, and can speak with animals. Most fairies have supplies of fairy dust that produce any effect the gamemaster thinks will help the story. Healing powders work on any living being, but

healing a wound requires 1 hour for every hit of damage the victim sustained.

The high fey can do basically anything they want, within the confines of the forest; for more information, see CHERLINDREA.

BROWNIES

"The fairies' ambassadors to humanity. Humanity had no say in this assignment."

—Fin Raziel



Most people meet brownies by accident, often when they open the cookie jar or picnic basket and find one gorging himself. Or when the brownie "helpfully" repaves a garden walk with drunken squirrels. Or he exchanges all the clothing in a lady's dresser with that in the gentleman's dresser three houses down. And so on. This makes for strained human-brownie relations.

Scholars were surprised to learn, then, that the fairies recruited brownies to be their intermediaries with humanity . . . diplomats, so to speak.

humans, and they forget everything before long. The rulers, the only ones with memories longer than a few seasons, could not be everywhere at once. So they decided to find servants who could.

No one is sure what the brownies were doing until then. Probably they were making the lives of humanity's prehistoric ancestors hard in more or less the same way they do now. The long experience would explain why they're so good at it.

Most brownies harbor intense curiosity about magic, though very few have any ability for it. When the high fey asked the brownies to serve them, no doubt they leaped at the chance. When the new servants moved into the fairy forest, the fairies befriended them instantly.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BROWNIES

The only source explaining their enlistment is a nearly illegible scroll by Menes the Incarcerate, an ancient writer of Lower Cashmere. "Incarcerate" is an old-fashioned term that means he wrote the scroll while in prison.

Some critics call Menes "the Inaccurate," for his other writings are riddled with unfounded gossip, legends, and inconsistencies. There is no reason to think his account of the brownies is any better, but it is the only one.

According to Menes, the fairy rulers, or high fey, became aware of humankind many thousands of years ago, before history began. When humanity rose to civilization, the fey saw they would have to come to terms with the new race or risk destruction.

But fairies could not negotiate peace treaties. Most of the happy folk never speak, they have no great interest in

PROTECTION SCHEMES

Intelligent, extremely long-lived (though not immortal like the fairies), and able to range across the world, the brownies soon became known in all human kingdoms. The name "brownie" is a human invention, and the fairies have adopted it.

But rather than protectors of the fairy forests, brownies became the inveterate and eternal nuisances of the world. For example, brownies require little food, but that doesn't stop them from gorging themselves for the fun of it and napping afterward. (A brownie can eat staggering amounts of food.) The explanation, it seems, is that the fairies envisioned their ambassadors in their image of humans.

The fairies looked at human beings and saw them to be greedy, violent, excitable, simpleminded, jealous, and prone to petty squabbles. So they looked for go-betweens that fit the same model.



Today, most humans find brownies disgusting. They feel the revulsion one knows when looking into a distorted mirror. The brownies happily cultivate that image by committing endless practical jokes. Why? Given their millennial lifespans, probably out of boredom.

Humans may not like the brownies, but smart humans know better than to annoy them. For example, one spring Urjax the Unconquerable, emperor of a great kindom, decided it was wasteful and undignified to pacify brownies by distributing bowls of candy and flavored ices around the forest edge. "I have nothing to fear and nothing to gain from brownies," he said in court. "Cease this bribery at once."

When the brownies learned of Urjax's orders, a host of them came to serenade the emperor with music—not the exquisite fairy music humans love, but brownie music, harsh cat wailing and pot beating and hee-haws. At every hour the musicians hounded Urjax through every room of his castle, giving him no rest.

He sent his guards after them, but the brownies vanished into the walls like mice. He tried smoking them out with foul incense, but they piled the censers in his bedchamber. He set cats on them, but the brownies rode the cats like horses. He tried traps and tricks and bribes, and after three sleepless days he was too tired to try anything more.

Then a delegation of brownies visited the emperor unannounced. In his bedchamber. After midnight. With a gesture, they stopped the music. They explained their grievance to Urjax and politely proposed that he resume his offerings. "Anything!" said Urjax the Unconquerable.

Some brownies can be domesticated, if that is the word, and brought into human culture. Since their adventure with Willow, Franjean and Rool have become pages at the court of Tir Asleen. But such "trained" brownies still display mischievous behavior when not watched closely.

Rool, for instance, has found fifteen different things to do to a noblewoman's petticoats, while the woman is wearing them. She hasn't discovered him yet, but people at court are remarking on the way sudden movements make her jump.

GAMING NOTES

Armor Class: 0	Damage: See below
Hits: 10	Alignment: Neutral
Move: 60'	Experience Value: 10
Attacks: 1	

Because of their small size and inhuman agility, any attack on brownies is -6 to hit.

SKILLS

Spear or bow, lockpicking, concealment, stealth, persuasion (sometimes). Brownies can ride small animals like cats or hawks. Brownies do not ordinarily cast spells, nor can they talk to animals as fairies do.

POSSESSIONS

Weapon (doubles as lockpick), plus whatever they can steal and carry. Brownies don't usually carry fairy dust; Franjean stole the Dust of Broken Heart.

WEAPON DAMAGE

Brownies can hit with greater accuracy than their hit dice indicate. Treat them as 5th to 7th skill-level fighters when striking. However, they do little or no damage. If a brownie makes his to-hit roll by 5 or more, he inflicts 1 hit point of damage; otherwise, no damage is done.

RIDING

A brownie can ride on a hawk, cat, small dog, or similar steed. In this case the brownie moves at the mount's speed. The brownie's weight, about two pounds, may slow the animal at the gamemaster's discretion.

BROWNIES TODAY

Menes claims all brownies are male, insofar as the term has meaning; no one knows how they reproduce. Reliable observers have not verified this. Certainly most brownies display traits associated with human males: aggression, boastfulness, defensive pride, and sometimes obstinate stupidity.

Humans with these qualities are dangerous. But though they can be tremendous nuisances, brownies are basically harmless. They don't lack ambition—Franjean, for one, has declared himself King of the World—only selfishness and the ability to hate. Without these, they are little more obnoxious than spoiled children.

Of course, even a spoiled child can be charming; no doubt that is why it survives. Brownies, too, may have their uses. Sometimes they take a shine to a particular person, and can be helpful. Franjean and Rool developed an attachment to Willow, and they did their best to help him on his adventure.

But it must be stressed, pointedly, that there is no predictable way to endear oneself to a brownie. Politeness seems to help, but their reactions often seem random, and they are easily offended. What's more, the case of Franjean and Rool points up that a helpful brownie can be even more troublesome than one who is out to get you.

TROLLS

"Filthy animals!"

—Lady Delphinia Gwin Suspirion, minor noble in the Pallathor province of Cashmere



otable for accuracy and circumstances, this famous summary of trolls survives as Lady Delphinia's only known proclamation. She made the observation seven centuries ago in the unsettled hills of Pallathor, as her palanquin fell to a pack of thirty trolls.

These words, her last, come down to us in a vivid eyewitness account by Groy, "Milady's Loyall Scribe & Onlie Survivor of the Fell Attacke" (as the ancient scroll reads). Groy had run some distance by the time Delphinia toppled, but he heard the words clearly "for she did screame them so."

The rest of Groy's lurid account is omitted here for reasons of taste and propriety. Among Bavmorda's Nockmaar minions, the full text, modernized, made popular light reading.

TROLL PACKS

Trolls are indeed animals and indeed filthy. Every Nockmaar villager or Nelwyn child knows legends of the trolls' cunning, serpentine intelligence and dark, ceremonial rites. But these legends survive mainly because most victims of trolls don't.

The few firsthand accounts, including Groy's, depict beasts of monkeylike savagery whose only "rites" are struggles for the tastiest parts of their prey. As for cunning, sources say trolls rank higher than beetles but lower than pigs. On one point, though, the legends are true: trolls make ferocious opponents.

Trolls are found in all habitats and every climate. Their ferocity derives from ruthlessness, stealth, and the strength of numbers. Trolls never run in packs of fewer than twenty, and some larger than fifty are reported. The few that Willow fought in the castle at Tir Asleen could only have been stragglers from a larger pack. The rest may have lurked elsewhere in the castle or gone out hunting.

Trolls hunt deer, birds, rabbits, gophers, snakes, gopher snakes, bears, wolves, sheep, shepherds, and stray travellers, among much other game. They eat walnuts, hazelnuts, peanuts, every other kind of nut, fruit of every variety, garden vegetables, and wooden stakes that the garden vegetables grow on. They eat grass, and grass fertilizer. They eat—yes—poison ivy. In a word, they eat everything.

But trolls eat mainly meat, in large amounts. Thirty trolls reduce a prize steer to bones in half an hour, and wipe out small herds in a week or two. So troll packs must roam constantly, seeking fresh food. One notorious pack ranged across three kingdoms, from Nockmaar up through the northern wastes, down into Cashmere, and even into Galladoorn (briefly).

At last the pack ventured into Nelwyn Valley, where the Aldwins of six villages banded together to wipe them out. Nelwyn village archives describe this episode in detail, but each village portrays its Aldwin as leader of the expedition, so particulars (like the Aldwins themselves) are fuzzy.

TROLL CLIMBING

Trolls scamper at full speed atop any level surface, and just as quickly along its underside. They move up and down walls with equal ease, like spiders. The ability comes from the trolls' adhesive finger and toe pads, and is definitely not magical.

But the effect can easily seem so, as it did to Willow in Tir Asleen Castle. "Trolls just appeared all at once," he recalls. One climbed down from a castle wall, while another clung beneath the courtyard bridge. (This coincidentally echoed Daikini children's tales of trolls who live under bridges.)

Another misleading point is the troll speech. They do sometimes speak after a fashion; not like parrots, for parrots repeat intelligible words, but in a peculiar hooting jabber that mimics speech without conveying meaning. Translated, all of their words seem to boil down to "food."

It seems a smart troll does appear now and then, in every few hundred births. Such a rarity can think of new strategies, use weapons, and even speak. This "sport" rises to leadership of the pack, and for its lifetime the pack feeds well. Luckily, offspring seem not to inherit its cunning.

Queen Bavmorda seemed fond of these troll sports. She domesticated a dozen or more as laborers in Nockmaar Castle, an unprecedented and offensive concept. Needless to say, none but Bavmorda has tried turning these beasts into servants, and probably no one else could.

In the castle the trolls learned speech on the order of "Food good," "Queen wants speak you now," and "Hurt him, hurt him!" As messengers they lacked understanding

of their messages. This helped to ensure their survival.

When Balmorda fell, her trolls fled the castle. Their fate is unknown, but rumors persist that the intelligent trolls still run together in a pack, organized in a new system of deadly effectiveness.

But in the story, Carbolomir was distracted by a passing butterfly, and his spell went awry. Instead of producing worshipers, he created savage beasts that hated all beauty. They set upon and killed Carbolomir, and ever since then, they have been looking for that butterfly.

TROLL ORIGINS

All cultures have troll creation myths. In Galladoorn old folks tell their grandchildren of a stone that fell from the sky, throwing off vapors that turned a village of perfectly ordinary people into the first trolls.

The Cashmeran legend, characteristically more abstract, claims that when people reach the depths of depravity, they change into troll form, grow hair, and prey on their fellows for eternity. (It is believed trolls actually live about five decades at most.)

The Nelwyns say an ancient Daikini wizard, Carbolomir the Mad, achieved awesome power. Declaring his godhood, he decided to create a race of worshipers. He began with apes from the southern jungles. In unspeakable rituals (at least the Nelwyn authors don't speak of them), Carbolomir endowed the apes with a germ of intelligence.

GAMING NOTES

Armor Class: 6

Hits: 3d6

Move: 120'

Attacks: 1 punch/1 bite

Damage: 1-3/1-6

Alignment: Evil

Experience Value: 30

Trolls in Willow's world do not resemble the traditional trolls in fantasy roleplaying games. In particular, they do not regenerate damage (wounded trolls heal only as fast as human beings), and they may move freely in full sunlight. A closer analogy is a gorilla or baboon.

Troll sports have 10 more hits than normal. A tribe seldom has more than one sport, and it is always the leader unless very young or female. Troll sports look just like ordinary trolls.

THE EBORSISK

"Piece of cake."

—Madmartigan



In a land of magic, no creature ever really becomes extinct. Or, more accurately, one can become extinct over and over again. Witness the Eborsisk, a two-headed dragon (the name itself is a corruption of a dead language's words for "twin skulls").

Petrified skeletons, thrusting from eroded hillsides, testify that Eborsisks once roamed the earth, long before recorded history began. No doubt they went unchallenged. Other skeletons of comparable size have been found, but they lack pointed teeth, indicating a diet of plants. These giants could offer no threat to a dragon. Eborsisks were predators, meat eaters, and (as shown from charcoal deposits near each skeleton) fire breathers.

This last point may provide a clue to their extinction—their first extinction, that is. The only fire breathers seen today are small lizards in arid parts of Cashmere, and the birds of the northern wastes that humans call "spark spitters."

Both examples show that fire-breathing creatures, more than others, require enormous amounts of food in proportion to body weight. The extra food goes to produce the gases they burn. A predator of the Eborsisk's size must have required whole herds of prey to sustain it. (Great numbers of petrified bones are found spread around each dragon skeleton.) Eborsisks may have been too successful as predators, wiping out or greatly reducing the population of prey, thereby causing their own extinction.



Other scholars sensibly observe that a creature who breathes fire is not the ideal resident of a forest. Since much of the Eborsisks' likely prey lived in primeval forests, fiery destruction of their habitat would kill the prey or force migration away from the dragons' domain. Again, without a food supply, they simply died out.

Whether or not fire-breathing dragons were originally created by magic is the province of myth. But certainly it was due to magic that one appeared at Tir Asleen.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

The recent reappearance of an Eborsisk prompted unusual interest, to say the least. Scholars, led astray by the confused accounts of survivors ("Four heads at least, I swear!" "Breathed flame, and ice, and meteor storms!" "It was blasted *big*, that's all I know!"), have sometimes drawn incorrect conclusions about that appearance.

When Willow and his friends barricaded themselves in Tir Asleen Castle while the Nockmaar army approached, they saw no signs of an Eborsisk. When Willow struck an attacking troll with Cherlindrea's wand, the creature turned into a repulsive thing much like an embryo, then fell into the castle moat. Moments later, the Eborsisk emerged.

Not even the foggiest scholar has gone so far as to wish he had been present at the scene, but some express disappointment that the re-created Eborsisk died before its habits could be studied. Now, its only known habit is berserk blood thirst.

Eborsisk skeletons did not indicate the peculiar mass growing on each head. This extrusion, called a "casque," is made of hard cartilage, and is also seen in some flightless birds of the southern jungles.

The birds strike with the casque as a bludgeon. The Eborsisk did not survive long enough for observers to tell whether it too used the casque as a weapon. One would think the dragon needed no more weapons than it had already demonstrated.

With its size, withering flame, lashing tail, and stamping feet, the Eborsisk was probably a match for the combined armies of Nockmaar and Galladoorn. The only successful tactic they might have used was a sneak attack on the heads, and no one but a foolhardy madman would conceive of such a thing.

How fortunate, then, that Madmartigan was on the scene. The swordsman leaped from the castle's bridge onto one head, drove his sword deep into the skull, and leaped away. The freakish luck and matchless skill that have kept Madmartigan alive so far continued to work: the blade blocked the dragon's throat, just as it was preparing to breathe another blast of flame. The gas pressure built within seconds, and the head exploded. The creature died in agony and a gory muddle.

This was the Eborsisk's second extinction.

DID IT HAVE COMPANY?

Scholars assume the Eborsisk was the last of the dragons—at least until someone else misusing a wand calls up another one. Though other dragons have figured prominently in history, both for good and ill, they seemed to vanish when Bavmorda ascended the throne, decades ago.

Do other dragons survive in the world? Few topics are more controversial. Many, many sightings are reported, but always in unreliable circumstances (often after the viewer has partaken of the liquor Cashmerans distill from wine dregs).

On one hand, it seems unlikely something as large as a dragon can remain unseen. On the other, some were clearly intelligent enough to hide well, and history says they often hibernated for decades at a time. If they still exist, no one has explained why they should want to sleep through these interesting times. Unless, of course, this "interest" is reason enough to curl up and hibernate.

GAMING NOTES

Armor Class: 0	Damage: 10d6/5d6/4d6
Hits: 150	Alignment: Neutral
Move: 150'	Experience Value: 6,000
Attacks: 3/turn	

Each of an Eborsisk's heads can breathe fire. The fire does 10d6 damage to everything in a cone-shaped area extending 50' from the mouth, reaching a maximum width of 30'. Only one head can breathe fire each turn.

The head that does not breathe on a turn can strike a single target with its casque, doing 5d6 damage.

The creature can also lash with its tail in the same turn it breathes fire. The tail inflicts 4d6 damage on all targets within 30' of the rear half of its body.

Madmartigan's killing thrust is the kind of foolhardy stunt that makes for memorable roleplaying. (Kids, don't try this at home.) A character can leap on the Eborsisk's head or neck with a successful dexterity check (modified as the gamemaster likes). The character must succeed in a strength check to cling there long enough to strike a blow. Failure means the character is thrown off, stunned, and is likely to be the Eborsisk's special interest for a turn or two.

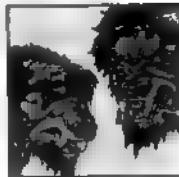
If the strength check succeeds, the character may roll to hit at +4, because he's at point-blank range. A successful strike automatically inflicts the character's maximum damage to the head. If this exceeds one third of the Eborsisk's remaining hit points, the blow is a critical hit, the head will explode, and the character has mere moments to leap away (another dexterity check).

A character who can't get away in time takes 2d6 damage from the explosion and will end up a real mess. The Eborsisk gets one more round of attacks at a -4 penalty to hit, then dies.

DEATH DOGS

"Fine creatures . . . clean-limbed, vicious, beautiful at the kill."

—General Kael



Bavmorda bred the Death Dogs, her feared war and hunting dogs, from wolflike predators that haunt the western wilderness. These "night hounds" kill livestock and, occasionally, owners of livestock. The night hound packs foil hunters; when a trap or tactic brings down one hound, the rest of a pack learn to avoid the trap or defeat the tactic. Their cunning matches the rat's.

Night hound packs display an almost human structure. A leader (always male) may have two or three "lieutenants" of either gender. These pack rulers lead assaults and eat first at the kill. When the pack lies down to sleep through the day, several hounds patrol the perimeter. Apparently, though not all reports are confirmed, the patrols work in regular shifts.

THEIR ORIGIN

Every Nockmaar soldier learned how Bavmorda acquired her breeding stock. Though the story exists in many versions, the beginning is always the same: The queen, knowing of the night hounds' savagery, journeyed into the west.

After searching in ways that vary with the teller, Bavmorda found a large pack. It was sunset, and the night hounds were ready to hunt. She walked into their midst, alone. They growled, the more loudly as she approached the pack's rulers. A few leapt at her from behind, then turned away a few inches short of her gown, as though changing their minds.

Bavmorda reached the night hound leader, an enormous barrel-chested cur with one ear and many scars. She spoke to it; it growled and attacked; she gestured, and it fell back. She spoke to the rest of the pack. They turned upon the leader and tore it to pieces. Then they gathered around Bavmorda and howled.

Bavmorda walked to the nearest wilderness settlement, the whole pack following closely. As they approached, settlers retreated into their homes. Bavmorda passed along the dirt road between the wooden huts. In her wake the night hounds tore at clotheslines, toppled rain barrels, and smashed feeding troughs. They ruined the settlement.

At the end of the dirt street Bavmorda turned. She announced to the settlers, who still cowered in their dark dwellings, "From now on, if any of you see a hound, let it

pass unmolested. It runs toward Nockmaar Castle to serve me."

The Death Dog breeding program began soon after this. Bavmorda seized the nobility's finest animals: mastiffs, elkhounds, Dobermans, and shepherds. With masterful skill her servants cross-bred them with the night hounds. From the frozen north trappers brought her live wolverines, the fiercest fighters that ever breathed. In the pits beneath Nockmaar Castle Bavmorda used dark rituals to infuse their ferocious essence into the new breed. The program was completed within a few years.

THE DOGS AND THEIR MASTERS

In breeding the night hounds with conventional stock, Bavmorda improved the strain's endurance and trainability. The new Death Dogs also worked better in daylight. But the ancestral cunning remains.

Death Dogs are unusually strong, fast, and ferocious. A Death Dog can race a mile in a few minutes or lope across half a kingdom in a day. After either run a pack of dogs can take on a few wolves or a small bear and expect to eat well that night. The dogs rely on acute sight and hearing, for their sense of smell was blunted in the breeding process—their only weakness.

Smarter than ordinary canines, Death Dogs understand commands and think as well as a bright five-year-old child. Though a dog runs best in a pack, it is smart enough to hunt on its own. For instance, a single Death Dog entered Willow's village looking for Elora Danan. Luckily, no others ran with it, for the Nelwyns could hardly have handled them.

Before the Nockmaar army fell, every soldier respected the Death Dogs' masters, strong men who wore heavy leather and said little more than their charges. The Death Dogs in any Nockmaar company usually numbered half a dozen, all raised from infancy by a single master. A dog obeyed only its own master, and sometimes the master's commander (and, of course, Bavmorda).

If a dog's master died, the animal usually ran away from its company at the first chance. Since the dog would not take a new master, humans seldom interfered.

The Death Dog often headed into the wilderness and



grew wild, running and breeding with wolf packs. The offspring, known as "dire wolves," are if anything more brutish than their parents. With the fall of the Nockmaar army, these packs have grown in number and viciousness. In isolated areas dire wolf packs sometimes terrorize whole villages.

GAMING NOTES

Armor Class: 5	Damage: 3d6 bite/1d6 claw
Hits: 30	Alignment: Evil
Move: 180'	Experience Value: 180
Attacks: 2 (bite and claw)	

Dire wolves have 35 hit points, and each of their attacks does +1d6 damage. However, their running speed is only 150' per turn.

DRUIDS

"Poor practitioners of the Arts, and spineless . . . but they have their uses."

—Queen Bavmorda



Bavmorda's druids are not mute, but they don't say much. Speaking too freely has proven dangerous. They survive through quiet obedience.

The druids assist Queen Bavmorda by preparing her spell materials, aiding her in rituals, and sometimes by casting minor rituals themselves. These priests are adept in the rites of ceremonial magic, but lack ability with more immediate forms of spellcasting. They excel in rote memorization of complex incantations. True understanding of magic they leave to Bavmorda.

As a result, their rituals sometimes go awry. Once this led to a fateful mistake. Their incorrect clairvoyance ritual turned into a prophecy of Bavmorda's dark fate, and alerted the queen to the appearance of Elora Danan. (See BAVMORDA.)

THE PARTING OF THE DRUIDS

Though historical information is sketchy, there appear to be two groups called druids. Both are (or were) classes of learned priests and teachers, and both are quite old. But the two types are profoundly different.

The Senkadi, whose name is Old Cashmeran for "Oak Tree Keepers," were peaceful nature worshipers. They wandered the countryside, subsisting on vegetables, and instructed children in the lore of the forest. Legends claim that Senkadi druids commanded nature's magic. They could speak with animals, make plants grow at will, and lie sleeping in the hearts of oak trees for years at a time.

The Senkadi elected a leader from their ranks, an "archdruid." Many centuries ago, an aged archdruid passed away and the druids held a new election. One candidate, Brithemain, knew little of lore or magic, but excelled in ambition.

The night before the election, Brithemain gathered a few strong-armed allies, then attacked and killed the opposing candidates. At morning he declared himself the new archdruid. His supporters silenced all who questioned his claim. The Senkadi, sworn to pacifism, appeared to accept Brithemain rather than resort to violence.

However, nine tenths of the druids left the forest the next night, wandering far away beyond Brithemain's authority. They taught no more children and recruited no new members. Sources do not tell what happened to the Senkadi, but to this day forest travellers report seeing "strange, robed men" in the deep woods. Unfortunately, the sightings are unreliable, and the survival of the Senkadi is doubtful.

A few druids remained with Brithemain, out of loyalty to



the druidic order. The new archdruid made sweeping changes in their practices. With these changes came a new, more violent order, named after its founder.

THE BRITHEMAIN DRUIDS

Brithemain initiated human sacrifices. Each year at midsummer the druids built a huge wicker structure, imprisoned up to a dozen living people or other beings inside, and set it afire. While the victims burned, the druids chanted to drown out their screams.

Archdruids appointed their own successors. At the ruler's death, his spirit was assumed to migrate to his successor. Druids believed that all archdruids were reincarnations of Brithemain. The successors' true origins were expunged from the records; druidic histories make it appear Brithemain himself has reigned for hundreds of years. Also, unlike the Senkadi, the Brithemain admitted only males to their order.

By the time Bavmorda ascended to the throne, the druids' love of nature and learning had given way to pure lust for power. Since Bavmorda felt the same way, she thought they would make ideal servants and assistants. So one midsummer night, in the midst of their ritual sacrifice, she paid them a visit.

Though Brithemain strictly forbade writing about sacrifices, the appointed Tale-keeper of the druids, Filad, left a rare written account of that evening. The crime sealed Filad's fate: Bavmorda imprisoned him, among many others, beneath Nockmaar Castle.

"When the sacrifices did make loudest cry," Filad wrote, "then did worshipful Brithemain [that is, the archdruid] commence his Chant of Inviolation. The brethren [druids] did echo the Chant, but then a most troubrous noise did sound in the clearing, and worshipful Brithemain was hurl'd as by unseen hands into the burning pyre."

"His scream did outmatch all other sacrifices," Filad continued. "In anguish did the brethren look on helpless at his doom. Then the Queen Bavmorda did appear alone in the clearing, the first in many ages a woman was seen in the ritual as aught but a sacrifice. She did speak in clear, cold voice, saying, 'You are leaderless, and I shall see that you remain so, unless you acclaim me at once your leader.'"

This seems to have worked. Many druids served Bavmorda in Nockmaar Castle, while the rest of the order became spies for her regime. With Bavmorda's fall, most druids renounced their order or were killed by irate peasants.

DRUID STONES

The most prominent artifacts of past druid culture are the rune-embossed "druid stones" found in isolated spots nearly everywhere in the kingdoms.

All of them are very old; none have seen use in living memory. In fact, it is not clear exactly what their function was, though they undoubtedly figured in ceremonies. They are definitely not grave markers, putting to rest one theory that says they mark the bones of dragons.

The most famous druid stones are the monolith group called the Standing Stones, east of Nelwyn Valley (see *THE WORLD OF WILLOW*). The Standing Stones figure prominently in druid lore, but only in the past tense. Unsubstantiated rumors speak of weird druidic rituals conducted amid the Standing Stones.

GAMING NOTES

Armor Class: 7	Damage: as weapon type
Hits: 25	Alignment: Neutral (Senkadi)
Move: 60'	Evil (Brithemain)
Attacks: 1 (weapon)	Experience Value: 50

Some game systems treat druids as a character class or profession. The druids of Willow's world—at least the world of today—differ so much from these descriptions that there are now fewer similarities than contrasts.

Briefly, *Senkadi* druids match your game's description (if any). If your game does not describe druids, treat *Senkadi* characters as medium-level magicians who specialize in spells relating to life, plants, animals, and the natural elements. They believe in poverty, charity, and the balance of forces, and are aggressively neutral in alignment. Sometimes they know some form of martial arts, and can do up to 3d6 damage with a bare-handed strike. They seldom carry weapons.

The closest equivalent to *Brithemain* druids in a fantasy roleplaying system would be a sage or scholar. These druids do work magic, but only ritual magic, and only in ceremonial groups. For game purposes, consider them nonmagical. They know no martial arts, but sometimes carry swords, bows, or crossbows.

MAGIC

Nothing marks Willow's world more dramatically than its magic. In this section, you will read about all the spells Willow encountered on his adventure, from Dust of Broken Heart to Ba'morda's final Ritual of Obliteration.





Y

ou who would float, cast light and smoke like fishing flies, turn River Troon to wine, see a king's robes in a daughter's teardrop, stand burning and laugh, petrify blood to red quartz, twist Nature's make to forms of grace or nightmare, raise winds, part seas, torment affection—reader, give heed! Magus Morian offers herewith the secret lore of wizards."

So begins the introduction to Morian's *Summation of the Secrets of Magical Inquiry*, better known among scholars as *The Twelve Scrolls*. Only fragments of one scroll still exist, though Morian lived hardly two centuries ago. (Morian's other works, *Seven Magical Mantras That Lead to Wealth* and *Obtaining the Affection of Women Through Mental Telepathy*, are also lost.)

The destruction of Morian's work shows the most obvious aspect of wizardry: its intense secrecy.

Sorcerers guard their lore jealously, even fanatically. They choose apprentices with utmost care, swear them to oaths of secrecy, and refuse to discuss even the simplest spells with "outsiders." The information that does filter down to the public "goes astray" in unexpected ways. Sometimes those who speak too freely have met premature ends, especially in Nockmaar during Queen Bavmorda's reign.

Why the secrecy? Cynics claim that wizards only want to preserve their monopoly on the forces of magic. Wizards say occult knowledge strains all but the most disciplined intellects, and that ordinary people who learn the secrets would go insane. No impartial observer has been able to reach a conclusion.

WHAT IS KNOWN

Magic is a force that affects other forces and substances. It can circumvent any law of nature. Though its workings are unknown, living creatures may influence it. Magic seems to obey certain rules, known only to its students.

The use of magic is a skill. Apparently anyone can study and learn it, but as with any skill, some are more suited for it than others. Studies are usually lengthy and difficult. That Willow was able to grasp many difficult spells so quickly shows his native aptitude for magic.

Students may learn magic from books of spells, from a teacher, or even by trial and error, though the last course is often deadly. Once a mage masters a given spell effect, he or she may cast it over and over again without further study. But casting a spell often seems to drain strength or cloud the caster's mind. Only the greatest mages, like Bavmorda and Fin Raziel, can cast many spells in a row.

Some creatures and races cast magical spells naturally, without study. These can be the most powerful effects known, but the casters are almost always bound to some particular source of magical power: a given location, a single type of effect, certain terrain, or a special kind of victim.

WORDS AND WANDS

Magus Morian wrote that the words of magic spells are appeals to invisible beings—whether demons, demigods, or deities, he claimed not to know or care.

Other mages, though, when they choose to comment on Morian at all, say he was wrong. The words, they say, only guide the mind into the proper state to control magical forces.

When Willow was learning the transformation spell that would restore Raziel, Fin Raziel said that *locktwaar* is the word that "pleads for change." So she must have thought that someone or something was listening.

Perhaps the words exist in the realm of magic as entities unto themselves. When an experienced wizard thinks of them, the words gain a fraction of that wizard's power. Then novices and untrained minds can invoke the words for their own spells, using the legacy of power from past incantations.

At any rate, nearly every human sorcerer incants words when casting spells. The common exceptions include objects that carry magic within them.

Magicians can invest portions of their power in objects. Cherlindrea, queen of the fairies, gave Willow a great wand, while the High Aldwin offered him acorns that turned their targets to stone. Also, some materials are naturally magical, such as the fairies' Dust of Broken Heart and the philosopher's-stone potion that Willow created to transform Fin Raziel.

Very few magical items linger in the world, and they are hoarded as exquisite treasures. The vast majority embody specific effects, like Willow's acorns. Most items can't do anything but summon lightning or cure warts or let the wielder sing like a nightingale. Therefore, wizards seldom bother to load themselves down with items.

Other items, incomparably rarer, bind actual power, and allow an experienced mage to augment his own strength for any effect. Mages would certainly use these if available, so their absence means they must be nearly impossible to create.

THE WILL

"We students of magic must have talent, discipline, and courage," wrote Morian, "but above all it is essential that we *believe*." Belief in oneself seems to be integral to the process of spellcasting. This helps explain Willow's early faltering in his attempts to transform Raziel. Until he could trust himself, he would never achieve mastery.

Just as essential is concentration. Words, objects, and rituals sometimes seem to be no more than a focus for the mage's own will. Indeed, it may be that those with sufficient concentration could cast magical spells without a word or gesture.



The importance of concentration is shown in those who achieve great magic. Balmorda, quite insane in her single-mindedness, was the greatest sorceress in history. Fairies concentrate totally on the matter of the moment, much like kittens. And like kittens, their attention span is brief, explaining why they are magical but not powerful.

Mages can achieve large effects only by prolonged concentration. Rituals allow (and require) this extended commitment, harnessing greater forces than a magician could hope to control on short notice. In her rituals Balmorda was able to create her canyon maze, trap Tir Asleen's citizens in quartz, and shape the environment on a large scale. Ritual magic is the province of the most highly skilled mages; lesser students are nearly always overwhelmed and destroyed by the forces involved.

"LIKE THE LEAVES OF THE TREES"

This was Magus Morian's pretty phrase for the number of different magic spells. Evidently almost any effect that a wizard can imagine, a wizard can cast—provided he or she can find the spell without falling victim to the research.

Magic is a chancy and fickle force, its rules subtle, its outcome variable. In searching for a spell to curdle milk, the wizard may unleash an enchantment that kills every cow for three miles around. A mistake in magically lighting a campfire can incinerate the campers. You can see why wizards' dwellings are usually at the edge of a village or out in the countryside, and the nearest homes are built safely outside the blast area.

Even well-established spells can have untoward effects in the hands of novices. Willow sent Fin Raziel through several animal forms before finally transforming her back to her original human shape.

However, once learned, a magic spell is safe for the caster. Also, spell effects fall into a dozen or so broad classes, and within each class, spells resemble one another closely. This makes the task of finding new effects much easier for the experienced mage. Turning someone into a sheep is not so different from turning him into a goat; calling up a storm is essentially the same as calling up many individual lightning bolts. And so on.

The classes of effects are close secrets. Witnesses have inferred an incomplete list. In Willow's adventure he encountered transformations, illusions, explosions, fire, lightning, encasement in quartz, a shelter charm, creation of new terrain, force screens, levitation, animation of objects, freezing, telekinesis ("mind over matter"), and Balmorda's Ritual of Obliteration. No doubt other classes exist.

One class of effects has never been witnessed in historical times. No one has demonstrated a reliable spell to animate or resurrect the dead. Not even Balmorda, it seems, was capable of such colossal evil. This does not mean resurrection is impossible, just that it is unknown outside of legend.

Another seldom-seen spell type governs the control of another mind. Such "charms" must be difficult or time-consuming to cast, for even the great wizards do not rely on

them. Balmorda's spell to ensure the obedience of the trolls is more an indication of the low troll intelligence than of the ease of the spell. Her enslavement of Prince Mikal Tanthalos (see *BALMORDA*) entailed a long and difficult ritual.

In *Willow's* world, thinking creatures can usually be sure that their thoughts are their own—unless they've been hit with Dust of Broken Heart!

GAMING NOTES

If your game treats magical spells as skills to be learned, you should have no problem adapting this material. Be sure to eliminate charm and resurrection spells. Treat "spell level" as a ranking of the spell skill's difficulty; 1st-level spells are the easiest to learn, 9th-level the hardest.

If you have a system that forces wizards to relearn spells after each use, try the following substitute systems to simulate *Willow's* magic.

LEARNING SPELLS

Once a mage learns a spell, he or she knows it permanently, and can cast the spell as many times as desired.

Learning a spell usually requires a spellbook—a rare item (see *THE BOOK OF MAGIC*)—and a teacher. The teacher cannot teach spells of higher level than the teacher's own skill level. A student can learn spells higher than his or her own skill level, but casting these spells incurs substantial penalties (see below).

Otherwise, learning spells can be handled in your game system's usual way.

CASTING SPELLS

A magician can cast any spell any number of times. However, each time the spell is cast, subtract the level of the spell from the caster's constitution or equivalent attribute. (If your game doesn't use spell levels, the gamemaster should group the spells into eight to ten categories of strength, numbered according to strength or power of the effect—the larger the number, the larger the effect.)

The reduction in constitution is temporary. The wizard regains constitution points at the rate of 1 per hour (2 per hour when asleep). If the caster's constitution reaches zero, he or she falls unconscious for 1d6 hours.

Wizards of high level or skill subtract less from their constitution when casting spells. For each 5 levels or skill points, subtract 1 less from the caster's constitution when a spell is cast (minimum 1 point cost).

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Casting a spell requires the caster to make an intelligence ability check. A successful check means the spell "goes off" as intended. Usually the magician can't do anything else that turn, but this varies among game systems.

Failure in the check means something went wrong. Either the spell did not work at all and nothing happens, or it backfired and produced the wrong effect. The result is up to the gamemaster, who should choose the outcome that is the most entertaining or helps the story best. After a failed attempt, the magician can take no other action that turn.

For difficult spells, the gamemaster may reduce the ability check's chance of success. For every 1 by which the spell's level exceeds the character's own skill level, add 5 to the die roll (that is, make it harder for the player to roll under the character's intelligence attribute). Also, subtract double the usual amount from the caster's constitution.

MAGICAL ITEMS

Sorcerers in Willow's world don't rely much on routine magical items. To reflect this, adjust your game system to reduce the importance of magical items to wizards. Some suggestions:

- (1) A player character can only enchant an item with a single spell effect. Creating an item for general

purposes, like Cherlindrea's wand, is beyond a human magician's ability. A wizard can do nothing else on the turn he or she uses an item.

- (2) An item must have one of two limitations. Either it is "one-shot," so that its magic disappears after the first use; or else using the item subtracts from the user's constitution, just as though the user were casting the spell himself (see above).
- (3) The gamemaster may wish to limit the number of items a wizard can carry, citing magical interference among their energies. Also, magical items are not often found in treasures, nor sold commercially.
- (4) Extremely powerful items, such as Cherlindrea's wand, should only be found after an extended search with many adventures. They never lie around loose in dungeons!

OTHER DETAILS

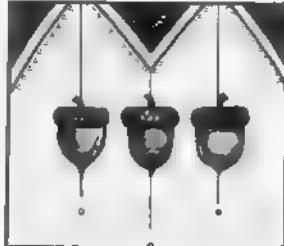
Rules for spell duration, ritual magic, and so forth work in your game system's usual way.

MAGIC ACORNS

Wizards can invest objects with part of their power. Willow's High Aldwin used acorns, but he might as easily have chosen bones or peach pits or sparrow feathers—anything that was once alive.

The advantage is that a mage can encapsulate his power for later use or use by others. The drawbacks are equally clear. The user may fail in directing the magic, as when Willow dropped one of his acorns and missed the troll on the castle bridge at Tir Asleen. More important, the enchanted item can be taken and used against the owner. Lucky indeed that Willow avoided that fate.

Those adept in magic, or powerful in their own way, can resist the acorns' petrification. Bavmorda triumphed over Willow's last acorn through a profound effort of will. She may have been the only person able to resist its spell, but future acorn throwers should not count on it.



GAMING NOTES

The acorns work as a standard petrification effect in your game's magic system. They turn anything they are hurled at into stone. An acorn affects only a single object; you can't drop one in a river and turn the water to stone! In debatable situations, the gamemaster's word is final.

Anyone can use an acorn. The user makes an ability check against his skill in throwing weapons—or, if your system has no such skill, a check against dexterity. Success means the acorn hits the target.

Victims get a saving throw versus (of course) Turn to Stone, or an ability check against the character's highest magic skill. Characters without magic skill use half their constitution attribute, rounded down.



DUST OF BROKEN HEART

Created from powdered fairy wings (see FAIRIES), Dust of Broken Heart inspires lovesickness in most intelligent creatures. Usually it works best when sprinkled in the victim's eyes, but sometimes tasting or sniffing it serves just as well. The effect lasts until the dust is rinsed from the eyes (usually less than half an hour), or makes its way through the system (possibly as long as half a day).

Customarily the victim falls passionately in love with the first creature of the opposite gender it sees. But as with any magic substance, the basic idea carries many qualifications. Some races are more prone to Broken Heart than others, especially brownies. Those skilled in magic can sometimes resist its effects.

The love craze can even take hold when the victim can't tell the gender of the intended creature—for instance, in the tavern, Rool formed a powerful attachment to a tomcat.

The dust sometimes takes several minutes to trigger the full mania. Until then the victim merely acts goofy, as Madmartigan did before seeing Sorsha in her tent at the Nockmaar base camp. A sudden interest in moonlight, sunsets, butterflies, gentle breezes scented with new-mown grass, shepherd's pipes, summer rain, nightingales, or (rarely) total eclipses of the sun can be a symptom of Dust of Broken Heart.

OTHER DUSTS

Powdered *sayara* wings can produce other effects as well (see FAIRIES). Known dusts include:

Dust of Smoldering Fury

Powdered Melody (inspires an overwhelming urge to sing)

Dust of Shattered Dreams (despair or paranoid suspicion)

Sleep Sand

Screeching Powder (intense fear)

Dust of Lingering Sorrow

There may be others; if so, only the high fey know them. Aside from the repercussions of the victim's changed behavior, fairy dust has no ill effects.

GAMING NOTES

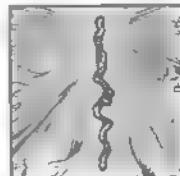
Dust of Broken Heart, and fairy dust in general, works as a charm spell. It produces only the effect associated with the dust: love, anger, fear, etc. The victim gets a saving throw against spells at -5 or more, or an ability check against constitution at the same minuses (gamemaster's discretion).

If the victim gets the dust in his eyes, the effect lasts 2d6 minutes, or until his eyes are rinsed out. If the victim eats or sniffs the dust, the effect lasts $5 + 1d10$ hours.

CHERLINDREA'S WAND

"Don't play with that. Cherlindrea told you: it holds vast powers."

—Franjean



The magic wand of the fairy queen Cherlindrea was, to all appearances, a crooked stick made of ash wood, about eighteen inches long. It was certainly one of the most powerful magical items of recent times.

Only very occasionally does one find an item that increases a magician's overall power, that in effect multi-

plies the number and effect of the mage's enchantments. Such an item would be useful to any wizard, no matter his or her native power. Their rarity attests to the difficulty of creating them. Historically, when an item of such enormous potency appears, it changes the course of nations and civilizations.

Creating such an artifact must be beyond the skill of



nearly all human wizards. Even Balmorda never made such an item. But Cherlindrea, within her fairy forest, is virtually omnipotent. She designed and crafted a wand to augment Fin Raziel's power almost to Balmorda's level.

GAMING NOTES

Cherlindrea's wand effectively increases the level of the magician using it. The mage must "bind" the wand. This takes ten minutes of concentration; binding is itself a second-level spell.

While holding the wand, the mage may cast spells as a

mage five levels higher than his actual level. More spells, and more-powerful spells, can be cast. The effect begins on the next round after the mage first grasps the wand, and ends as soon as the mage stops touching the wand. If more than one mage at once touches the wand, none receives its benefits.

A mage who uses the wand without first binding it takes 2d6 damage each time it is used. (This is what threw Willow into the tree the first time he tried it.)

The mage may subtract 1 point of damage for each experience level he or she has achieved. For example, a 5th-level mage would subtract 5 from the damage the wand inflicts. (This is why Raziel and Balmorda could use the wand without damage.)

TRANSFORMATIONS



The transformation is among the oldest, most difficult, and certainly most dramatic of magical effects. Whatever its origin, it was well established among magicians when recorded history began. The general populace knew of it, despite the secrecy shrouding all magic, because its effects were so obvious. When your monarch gets turned into a toad, you tend to notice.

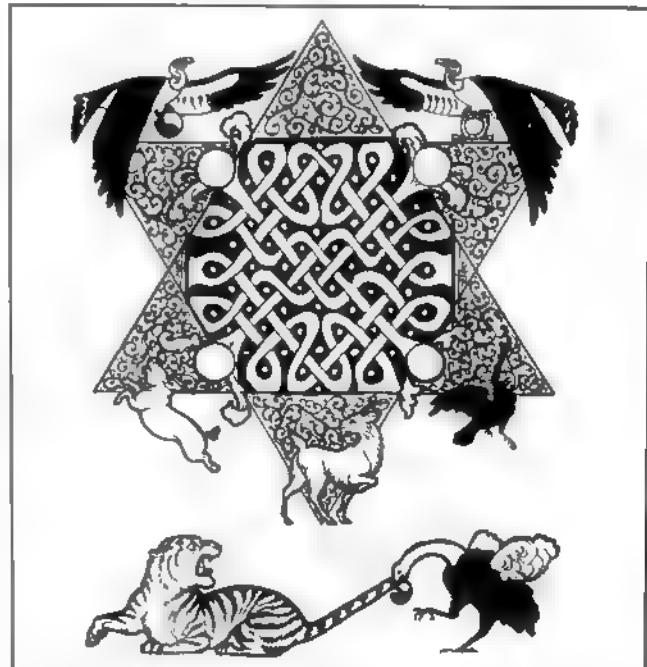
But magicians seldom use transformation as an instrument of political policy, for two reasons. First, they tend to lack interest in worldly power, Balmorda being the signal exception in this respect. Since even the maddest ruler usually leaves wizards alone, wizards feel little need to make most rulers start croaking.

Second, many magi cannot master the transformation spell. Since a backfire can have disastrous effects, they usually dare not risk it.

The *Hamartiad*, an anonymous and disreputable Cashmeran history, tells of an exception. In the ancient empire of Jyranthi (now Cashmere), after a century of peace and stability under the Six Wise Rulers, the mad emperor Collodius succeeded to the throne and quickly drove his realm to ruin. Believing himself a god, he exhausted the treasury in infantile celebration, while borders lay undefended and citizens starved. Brobantula, "the graytest conjairer of that tyme" (at least according to the *Hamartiad*), resolved to take action.

Brobantula first had to overcome the emperor's wards, amulets, and guardian mages. He presented Collodius with a mechanical songbird. The automaton sang in six languages and flew "wyth the noteworthyest sprightly grayce." Overjoyed, the emperor installed the bird in his bedchamber.

That same night, Collodius commanded the automaton



to sing a lullaby. The bird poured forth an enchanted dirge, putting the emperor and all his guards to sleep. Brobantula, "hys ears stopped up wyth waxen drops," entered, removed Collodius's protective amulets, and cast a transformation spell.

As Brobantula later told it in the torture chamber, "hys conjairation went awry, on account that he hyrd not hys



GAMING NOTES

own wyrd of shayping." Intending to turn Collodius into a worm and have the automaton gobble it up, the wizard only partly succeeded.

The transformed emperor, described as "nyne hondred feet of length" but probably only a tenth that long, gobbled up the automaton instead, along with dozens of guards, the furniture of three palace rooms, and the royal family. Then Collodius burrowed through the marble floor of the palace, slithered away through an aqueduct, and was never seen again.

Brobantula escaped by a levitation spell, but winds were calm over the palace and he could not move laterally. Eventually he had to descend into the arms of the waiting guards. "In a spirit of gratitude, hys suffering and death were mercifully brief."

"Gratitude" at the fall of Collodius notwithstanding, the empire of Jyrathi plunged into anarchy and soon fell—such are the dangers of mixing magic with politics.

TRANSFORMATION IN MODERN TIMES

Most magicians active today find transformation immoral, or at least unfashionable. They use it mainly for minor stunts, like the High Aldwin's trick of turning a stone into a bird. Responsible wizards feel transforming a target against its will tampers with a fundamental natural order, and shows disrespect for the universe.

Queen Bavmorda transformed her most formidable victim, Fin Raziel, into a possumlike creature, because she could neither murder nor imprison Raziel. Bavmorda probably chose this form for her rival because it lacks natural weapons, cannot swim well (ensuring Raziel would stay on her island), and, very likely, because it is so ugly. Bavmorda and Raziel once fought for a prince's love; Nockmaar's queen must have laughed to trap her lovely rival in such a body (see their respective entries).

Willow Usgood, using Cherlindrea's wand, tried several times to dispel Bavmorda's enchantment and return Raziel to her normal shape. In his multiple failures, and through his other uses of the wand, the world witnessed more shape-changing magic than it has seen in a while (and more than Raziel ever wants to see again).

When Willow struck the troll in Tir Asleen Castle and turned it into an Eborsisk, he accomplished by accident what no other magician has managed on purpose. "Beginner's luck," Fin Raziel chuckled later.

Whether Bavmorda transformed magicians other than Raziel has not been revealed. But no other wizard could withstand her; that became clear at Nockmaar Castle, when 200 of Airk Thaughaer's knights became, in the literal sense, pigs. Historians search the years in vain for another transformation of this scale. The spell, like her Ritual of Obliteration and the curse on Tir Asleen, died with Bavmorda.

For the most part, transformations in *Willow's* world work like the shape-shifting spell(s) in your own roleplaying system. Some features that may differ include:

EFFECTS

The target retains its intelligence and wisdom attributes in the new form. It can speak, if it could before the transformation. Other attributes become those of the new form. The target gains the physical and other inborn abilities of the form. Raziel could fly in raven form, and the troll-become-Eborsk could breathe fire like a real dragon.

Transformed magicians, such as Raziel, can cast spells only in intelligent humanoid forms (Daikinis, Nelwyns, fairies, brownies, and even Pohas, but not cyclopes or trolls).

The transformation is permanent. "Dispelling" it requires a magician to cast a new transformation spell to reshape the target into its previous (or native) form. It cannot otherwise be dispelled, except with a wish or other major magic. The magician need not know the target's native form. Returning it to this form is easier than other transformations, so the mage gets a +3 bonus to the success roll.

RESTRICTIONS

Practically speaking, a mage really can only transform a target into something that actually exists, or has existed, in the game world. No winged pigs, no four-headed hamsters, no personal computers. The gamemaster may allow a mage to try creating a creature from myth, like a Pegasus, but this will be more difficult than usual. Assess a penalty of -1 to -4 to the roll, depending on the idea's outlandishness.

The greater the difference in size between the original form and the desired result, the harder the spell. Figure the hit dice or hits of the desired form, and compare this figure to the original form's amount (assume the original is unwounded). Each 5 points' difference subtracts 1 from the mage's success roll.

If the mage still succeeds in this adjusted roll, the target must make a saving throw versus spells or be transformed into the desired form. (The target can waive the saving throw if it wants to be changed.) If the mage fails the roll to transform the target, as Willow did so often, you probably know what happens next....

BACKFIRES

A failed transformation roll turns the target into something else. The gamemaster can pick something amusing, like a raven or goat or even a character of the opposite gender from the target. Or roll dice and consult a table. Any table. Wandering monsters, random wilderness encounters, you name it—there ought to be something with the wrong number of arms and legs on that table, and the target gets turned into it.



A backfire is the only way to create really large or small forms. If the mage intentionally tries for a backfire, hoping for an Eborsk, the gamemaster should make the backfire produce the least-desirable creature imaginable. That's why it's a backfire, after all.

THE SHELTER CHANT

Raziel told Willow to use this chant to protect himself from Bavmorda's mass transformation. By its use he avoided becoming a pig. A handy spell!

The shelter chant is a 3rd-level spell. It neutralizes the effect of any transformation cast upon the magician. The magician must stand still, chanting continuously, for the duration of the rival transformation spell. It shelters the magician and anyone else within a five foot radius.

The chant automatically succeeds if the rival mage cannot see or hear the chanter. Otherwise, the chant adds the chanter's skill level to his saving throw against the spell. For instance, a 7th-skill-level mage casting the shelter chant would add 7 to the saving throw.

THE RITUAL OF OBLITERATION

"Now you will watch me draw upon the energy of the universe to send that child into the netherworld."

—Queen Bavmorda



mong Queen Bavmorda's many atrocities, her conquests, murders, and slave camps; her enlistment of the Nockmaar minions, trolls, and Death Dogs; her curse on Tir Asleen, destruction of Galladoorn, pollution of River Troon, and devastation of her own land of Nockmaar . . . among all these abominations, perhaps her Ritual of Obliteration is the most odious.

It is believed to be nothing less than an enchantment to destroy a living being's spirit, not just its body or its life—for many spells serve that purpose now—but its very essence. Bavmorda attempted to cast it on Elora Danan, in the highest tower of Nockmaar Castle, in order to foil the prophecy. No one has ever attempted this before—no one even knows if it is possible, for there is no clear evidence. But Bavmorda clearly believed this would be the ritual's effect.

Scholars, wondering why Bavmorda did not simply kill the infant, have come to believe that Elora, as a highly magical being, may have some special power of "return." Clearly Bavmorda believed this. If true, it is just one more remarkable ability the child possesses (see ELORA).

The spell's existence, revealed after Bavmorda herself fell victim to it, has provoked more outrage than all her other actions ever could. In creating this ritual, Bavmorda presumed a power that no sane ruler has ever desired.

BAVMORDA'S FATE

Discussing details of the ritual would be irresponsible. But naturally there has been great interest in the way Queen Bavmorda perished at its conclusion. In general terms, here is what happened.

The ritual, as Bavmorda herself said, draws on the energy of the universe. The meaning of this cosmic phrase is not clear. But during the ritual, the mage summons a great deal of this energy, whatever it is. Its conduit is a routine spell of weather control.

The ritual begins with the strike of a gong, and it sounds again at the start of each hour. All the while, the executing mage must cast many spells of binding on the target. At the end of the twelfth hour, the gong sounds thirteen times, and the summoned energy strikes the target in the form of lightning, supposedly with enough force to destroy the target's spirit.

Where did Bavmorda go astray? The ritual requires intense involvement on the mage's part. The mysterious energy works its influence; its evil nature is shown by the grotesque transformation it effected in Bavmorda.

By becoming involved, the mage risks disaster. Once the energy is concentrated, it must have an outlet . . . if the

target is not present, or the ritual goes awry, then the mage must become the target.

When Willow worked his disappearing-pig trick to make Elora vanish, Balmorda believed her target was gone. Given a moment's thought, she probably would have realized the truth. But under the circumstances, she panicked, stepped forward and upset vessels containing fluids used in the ritual.

Once the altar was corrupted, the energy turned on the caster. Balmorda was struck by the deadly lightning and annihilated.

Upon Balmorda's death, the weather spell summoning her thunderstorm was dispelled. Many of her other large-scale enchantments, such as the canyon maze surrounding Tir Asleen, disappeared at the same time. This is a common feature of powerful spells, apparently designed to minimize the strength needed to cast them. With their disappearance, there is evidence Nockmaar and the northern wastes may become habitable again, at least for wildlife.

IMPLICATIONS

No one has found a written record of the ritual. Presumably the only ones familiar with it were Balmorda and her closest druid servants, who perished on Sorsha's blade in the tower at Nockmaar. We can only hope there were no others.

But knowledge, once found, cannot be destroyed, any more than one can put rock back in a quarry and restore the trees above. Knowing now that it is possible, others undoubtedly are mad enough to try duplicating the ritual.

Eventually one must succeed. The legacy of madmen: even in defeat, they bring our world that much closer to madness.

Perhaps most frightening of all is the prospect that the ritual did *not* work. With no prior experience of the enchantment, magicians do not know if Balmorda has actually been dispatched for all time. She threw off the petrification spell of Willow's acorns. . . .

GAMING NOTES

The Ritual of Obliteration is a 9th-level spell. Only evil mages may perform it. It must be performed together with weather control, levitation of the target, and a wish. The ritual takes 12 hours; it requires a purified copper altar, 13 large candles, large quantities of human blood and many rare ingredients, a thunderstorm, and at least 2 assistants. Details are up to the gamemaster.

The target must be present (if not actually on the altar) at all times. The mage cannot leave the ritual area (defined as the area within a few yards of the altar). If attacked, the mage can fight normally during the ritual.

If the ritual is completed without interference, the target is destroyed. If the altar is corrupted or the target disappears, or if the mage falls unconscious, the mage is destroyed when the ritual concludes. Resurrecting a character destroyed in the ritual (even if survivors somehow discover resurrection magic) is impossible.

THE BONES

"Praise the bones!"

—Burglektt



staple of Nelwyn folklore, the bones figure prominently in several myths, guiding heroes or shamans toward the proper course of action. In village life they are used ceremonially, to foretell ideal dates for planting and harvest, to provide the omens for a newborn child, or as general oracles on any occasion.

The High Aldwin alone casts the bones in Willow's village. Customs vary in other Nelwyn villages; sometimes Aldwins perform the readings, but the task may also fall to elderly women, or less often to council members. A crucial point: each reader must prepare his own set by hand.

For reasons lost in folklore, the bones are always those of birds. Some readers favor the wingbones of sparrows, owls,



or hawks. Others, perhaps less motivated to climb trees, prefer the legs of ordinary chickens. A reader might use a dozen or more bones to calculate the reading carefully, or throw as few as three and rely on inspiration.

The usual technique is simple. Hold the bones in the palm of the hand or in a small open pouch, then pull the hand or pouch out from under the bones with a sharp motion. By the patterns the bones form on the ground—overlapping, far apart, lying on the arcs of an imaginary circle or other figure—the reader interprets the omen.

The advice is very seldom specific; the usual result is "seize the opportunity," "beware of strangers," "buy low and sell high," or some other vaguely useful truism. Talented magicians can employ the bones' oracles to greater effect.

The process is not foolproof, as the High Aldwin knew when he cast the bones to determine Elora's fate at the council meeting. The bones told him nothing. In this case, the reader may admit failure, but is better advised to do as the Aldwin did: decide the best course of action, and bluff outrageously.

you (as gamemaster) decide what information or advice you wish to convey to the player. Then have the player roll some dice; a high roll indicates an informative reading, while a low roll should be less helpful. Remember, the bones are only general indicators at best.

If you cannot decide what to tell the players, roll a 6-sided die and consult this chart:

(1) - Ominous portent (worst thing to come)	(5) - Inaccurately rosy view of the future
(2) - Vague but accurate advice	(6) - Buy low and sell high (or equivalent truism)
(3-4) - Nothing	

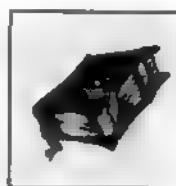
GAMING NOTES

Only a mage or expert in folklore should be allowed to use the bones, unless the gamemaster decides otherwise. When a player wants his or her character to "consult the bones,"

THE BOOK OF MAGIC

"Willow Ufgood, take this book of magic. You are on your way to becoming a great sorcerer."

—Fin Raziel



After Bavmorda's defeat, Willow and Fin Raziel, along with their allies and the Army of Galladoorn, returned to Tir Asleen. Bavmorda's curse had vanished with her death, and the citizens of this noblest kingdom were free. After a day of celebration (by those freed) and rest (by those who freed them), Willow prepared to depart.

As he climbed on his horse, Fin Raziel handed him a book of spells. She could give no greater assurance that his

long wait for initiation was finally over. Every major student of the magical arts requires a teacher and a spellbook. In Raziel, Willow had one of the best instructors. And he received the spellbook she herself must have used.

Raziel does not speak of the book to the uninitiated. But since she had deposited it in the Tir Asleen library, the castle librarian had access to it. This slender man, of duodecimo build, tightly bound, and yellowing at his edges, gazed on magical wonders that many scholars would trade



their libraries for. And what did he learn of this marvelous book?

"Anonymous. Untitled. No date. Folio vol., calfskin binding w/ stamped brass corner pcs, sewn spine (silk). ii + 54 pp vellum, handwrtn, unnumb. Illustrated. Good condition; slightly foxed."

MAGICIANS' BOOKS

Despite the secrecy that surrounds them, spellbooks excite the popular imagination and figure prominently in folklore. Each is a unique volume, containing spells the owner preserved for private use or posterity.

Minor tomes, workbooks for students, are not rare, though they are as carefully guarded as the rest. Larger books, like the one Fin Raziel passed on to Willow, are treasures that make a mage's fingers twitch. Each holds many common spells, and some may be found only in its pages and nowhere else.

Major books of magic share common characteristics beyond mere rarity. They tend to be very well made, though quality varies. The Senkadi druids used sheets of bark bundled with leather straps, and marginal cranks like Magus Morian wrote on whatever wandered by. But most volumes are bound to survive the ages.

Furthermore, they have a high turnover in ownership. As mages desire them above much else, and mages sometimes command great power, sorcerous battles are fought for possession of even a few torn pages.

The history of each major volume (and there are fewer than two dozen known) is an archipelago of scattered islands of fact amid seas of conjecture: written more often than not by an unknown hand, plundered amid disaster, appearing a century later a thousand miles away, stolen within days, sold, owner murdered and stolen again, disappearing for another century, reappearing in a crate in someone's cellar, and so on. In some romantic cases, the book's history becomes well-known even when its contents remain secret.

Such is not the case, unfortunately, with the book Fin Raziel granted to Willow. It is known she did not write it herself, at least not all of it. But how she obtained it, where, and when, is unknown.

BAVMORDA'S LIBRARY

Nockmaar Castle held several spellbooks. The majority, won by Bavmorda in combat or bought with the plunder of conquest, survived her death. According to Fin Raziel, they were routine in content; she would not say more.

But the queen of Nockmaar owned other books, of quite another class of rarity—the Texts of Third Order. The usual lore has it that their names are spoken in whispers, but nothing could be further from the truth. Those Third-Order texts that society knows to exist spawn legends and myths in great profusion.

Separating fact from fiction: some spellbooks are evil and contain evil magic. They are seldom if ever bound in human skin, as pundits would have one believe, or written in blood. Tanned human skin is too fragile for binding books. And it is hard to imagine a less-suitable writing fluid than human blood.

Actually, most evil texts are ordinary in construction. They are usually destroyed early in their careers. Good magicians do so as a matter of conscience. Evil magi often want no potential competitors to learn their secrets; perhaps their fears are prompted by thoughts of the violent ways they themselves obtained the books.

The Texts of Third Order are almost all evil. They are all very, very old, and cannot be destroyed. The three evil texts that are known in any detail contain no organic material at all. The *Malatrium* is bound in iron, with pages of the thinnest gold leaf. *King Bargatalo's Nineteen Curses* is engraved on nineteen untarnished copper plates bound on their edges with fifty-five brass rings.

The third, unnamed but known informally as the *Stone Book*, has covers of polished onyx with obsidian inlaid in runic patterns. Its pages are believed to be gold leaf. It is unknown whether anyone who opened it to check has survived.

Bavmorda owned two or perhaps all three of these. Only with the aid of Third Order texts could she create the canyon maze around Tir Asleen and entomb the castle's residents in quartz. She may have drawn on their resources in formulating her own Ritual of Obliteration.

The Texts of Third Order possess some sentience. All are protected with contingency spells that transport them away when their owner meets the customary awful fate. They vanished when Bavmorda fell victim to her Ritual of Obliteration, and it almost goes without saying that their current whereabouts are unknown.

GAMING NOTES

Fin Raziel's book of magic contains all the spells listed in this section, except Bavmorda's Ritual of Obliteration and other evil spells. The gamemaster can include other spells at his discretion, especially those that are of low level or introductory in nature.

The Texts of Third Order contain the most powerful spells in the campaign. They are protected by wards, poisons, or powerful guardians. Player characters should not be allowed to own them.

OTHER SPELLS

M

ost of the other spells that Willow performed or witnessed on his adventure were effects common to any fantasy roleplaying system. He saw many of them during Fin Raziel's final battle with Balmorda. Here are most of the lesser spells from the adventure, with notes where appropriate on adapting them to your own roleplaying game.

ANIMATE

The stray blasts from the final battle hit pieces of furniture, turning one into a savage brazier-monster.

If your system has no spell to animate an object, treat the furniture monsters as summoned creatures. If the gamemaster allows it, a summoning spell that works only on inanimate objects can be treated as one spell level lower than the usual summoning. The spell animates only one object, giving it hit dice equal to the level of the spell.

As an accidental side effect of a missed spell, this is best handled by the gamemaster as descriptive color in a battle.

BLAST/EXPLOSION

This spell makes the target explode. It works as a conventional magic bolt or fireball. It cannot be used on living things.

CANYON MAZE

The secret of Balmorda's massive barrier around Tir Asleen died with her. The spell is not available to player characters. The gamemaster can introduce it into the campaign as an invention of the most powerful magical villains.

The canyon maze can only be erected in a days-long ritual of massive power and evil. The caster requires many assistants to aid his or her power, most or all of whom die of exhaustion during the ritual.

FORCE SCREEN

Raziel used this to stop Sorsha in midair. It works like the common force field or barrier in your game, though it is invisible.

FREEZE

Raziel temporarily froze Balmorda in a shell of ice. This spell exists in most systems as "cold," or you can treat it as petrifaction (turning to stone) that wears off.

FREEZE IN QUARTZ

Balmorda placed this curse on every inhabitant of Tir Asleen. The victims, trapped in blocks of discolored quartz, did not die, but existed in suspended animation. This too works like the petrifying spell(s) in your game.

LEVITATE

A common magical effect, seen on both sides in Raziel and Balmorda's duel. This spell can be cast at the same time as another spell, allowing the magician to rise into the air and attack. The rate of movement is slow, the maximum height low.

If the mage uses it on another, the target gets a saving throw or constitution check to resist the spell, if desired.

THE WORLD OF WILLOW

In his adventure Willow saw several kingdoms and travelled wide stretches of wilderness. From peaceful Nelwyn Valley to the tormented land of Nockmaar, Willow's world provides a varied background for adventure.

This section tells about the world and the kingdoms Willow saw.



W

Willow takes place in a world where magic is real. Its lands may look strange, and their inhabitants definitely should, but in many ways you can feel right at home in this world.

For instance, calendar leaves here drop away in the usual sequence of days, weeks, months, and years. Their names vary among cultures. Less variable is the currency, based on gold, silver, and copper.

A copper piece buys a beer, two buy a meal; a silver piece buys beer enough for Madmartigan, or a meal big enough for some hungry brownies. A gold piece, two weeks' salary for a poor townsman, buys lodging for two or three nights at a good hotel, or a week at the tavern where Willow met Llug. Swords cost thirty to fifty gold pieces, horses twice that.

The climate of the world varies, even in the small area that Willow travelled in his adventure. Nelwyn Valley, to the south, is temperate, seeing two or three light snowfalls every winter, but is usually mild. Tir Asleen, though sunny most of the year, sees a gentle snow blanket for two or three months each winter. In the wilderness it snows nearly everywhere in winter, except along the coasts and in fairy forests.

Nockmaar and the northern wastes are subarctic climes, where little can grow except in a few desperate weeks of midsummer. Galladoorn, to the east, enjoys a warm climate because of its proximity to the ocean.

THE WORLD SURVEY

This map of the known kingdoms (see front of book) is based on a larger topography prepared in the reign of Queen Dell of Galladoorn. Dell, sometimes called the Wishful Explorer, never ranged half a mile from her castle, but she loved travellers' stories of foreign lands. She endowed many explorers, among them Leontes the Traveller, who dedicated all his writings to her.

For her renowned "World Survey," Dell commissioned the finest cartographers to prepare maps of the world. The results, unmatched in size before or since, covered vast expanses of the northern wastes, parts of the southern jungles, and the ocean coastline to the east.

However, all of these features were based on hearsay evidence from Leontes and other anecdotal sources, and are widely regarded as fantasy today. No reliable maps exist of those outlying regions.

The area shown includes all the lands Willow saw in his adventure. This realm, mostly wilderness, is centrally located among the major kingdoms. Because we still know little of this wilderness, the map excludes many features, especially the numberless villages that dot the landscape.

The map is not drawn to scale.

THE WORLD'S LANDS AND KINGDOMS

Willow's world exists at the technological level after the invention of the longbow but before firearms. In this feudal culture, sparsely settled kingdoms are subdivided into duchies and provinces ruled by minor nobles.

The exception is Nockmaar, which Queen Bavmorda governed absolutely (probably by magical means), and which lacks the population to fill more than one province in the southern kingdoms despite its enormous area.

Much of the world remains wild, heavily forested, and inhabited only by frontiersmen and animals. But signs remain of one, or perhaps several, forgotten civilizations. What were they?

Folklore in several cultures mentions the Mong Kok (or Morai or Mogalit), a race said to have lived in the world before the coming of humanity. They built a wondrous





society, tamed the weather, and flew in the sky. But they grew too proud, according to the myths, and the world-spirits struck them down.

RIVERS FREEN AND TROON

Prominent among the area's landmarks are the twin rivers, Freen and Troon. The names mean simply "west" and "east" in a forgotten language.

River Freen originates in the northwestern Nockmaar Mountains. Legend has it that its source is a "magic pool." Its waters heal injuries and restore vitality. No one has ever located this pool; the climb to the river's headwaters is too arduous for the earthbound, and flying searchers can make no headway against titanic mountain winds.

The Freen flows on a winding path through Tir Asleen and along Nelwyn Valley. Generally its waters are clear, its course peaceful. But stretches of rapids make passage difficult. How Elora Danan floated down the length of River Freen to Ufgood Reach is still unknown (see ELORA). The river swarms with fish, and many villages along its course survive on trout, copperbacks, and bass.

River Troon once flowed as clear as the Freen, until Bavmorda occupied Nockmaar. Through heavy mining and the destruction of farmland, she converted the Troon's source into a vast swamp, and the river itself to a long, open sewer. On hot days, thankfully rare in Nockmaar, the stench literally overwhelmed animals thirsty enough to drink its waters. The river no longer supports fish or plant life.

With Bavmorda's defeat, many hope the Troon will again run clear. But the task of cleaning it up is enormous.

Both Rivers Freen and Troon have many smaller tributaries, not shown on the map. Both rivers are believed to flow into a still larger river in the extreme south, in the jungle's heart.

NELWYN VALLEY

Willow's home is a verdant river valley carved by the Freen and sheltered by twin ranges of hills. Every hill is named (naming is something of a compulsion among some Nelwyns), but every village gives the hills a different set of names. Since one village has little contact with the rest, it seems to work out.

Low hills within the valley contain copper in commercial amounts (see NELWYNS), but not in amounts to attract much interest from outside kingdoms. The Nelwyns mine small amounts of tin and iron as well, but mostly they farm staple crops at subsistence levels.

The valley attracts few visitors, for there are few landmarks. The inhabitants, over centuries, have virtually manicured the forests around their villages. If there were anything of interest in them, the Nelwyns would have found it by now. In fact, one can easily believe they have, then destroyed or hidden whatever it was to discourage investigation by curious Daikinis.





THE WILDERNESS

Across the unsettled midsection of the map stretch large forests of pine, ash, oak, and, yes, willows. Patches of spruce and other evergreens flourish near villages, because of an ancient superstition that planting an evergreen bestows vigorous long life on the planter.

Through the woods run a few wide roads. They are very old, and the original sturdy brick pavement has worn down to dirt nearly everywhere. Their origin is uncertain, though many kingdoms give the credit to various great rulers in their history.

The roads are not always so wide, clear, and safe as the map indicates. In particular, the road running south to Cashmere alongside Nelwyn Valley is a treacherous stretch that the Nelwyns name the Rumblechunks. Cashmeran rulers have been vowing to repave it for at least a century. The road's poor upkeep prevented Willow and his friends from taking it to the Daikini crossroads. Instead, they followed River Freen.

The crossroads is a landmark by default, an accidental junction of once-important trade routes (Galladoorn-Tir Asleen and Nockmaar-Cashmere). When Bavmorda took over Nockmaar, she stopped trade with Cashmere, cutting one of the two routes; when she trapped Tir Asleen in the canyon maze, she severed the other as well.

The crossroads, once an informal meeting place and even a market site, fell into neglect. A nearby village began stranding convicts there to die, as almost happened to Madmartigan. Presumably it will acquire a better reputation, now that Bavmorda is gone and trade can resume.

Striking southwest from the crossroads, the traveller quickly encounters a patch of forest that smells sweeter, resounds with odd fluting noises, barely heard, and looks much darker from the outside than one would expect. This, of course, is Cherlindrea's fairy forest.

This is the only known fairy forest in this part of the kingdoms. Abutting and merging with a nonmagical forest, the fairy domain can surprise unwary journeyers. To an extent, this is the idea, for fairies, and especially brownies, delight in trapping and harassing "the big ones." For this reason, travellers stick to the roads or, when road conditions do not permit this, they rely on experienced guides to lead them around fairy territory. The Nelwyns, who travel as often as earthworms and about as far, did not know about Cherlindrea's forest—until they fell into the pit trap.

Along the road is one of several inn-taverns scattered along the travel routes. This one is notable as the place where Willow met Llug, Sorsha, and Madmartigan (in his guise of "Hilda"). The others are just as large, crowded, and no less raunchy than this one. They serve Galladoornian malt, wines from Tir Asleen (red and white; asking for rosé is asking for a fight), and many hard liquors like "sunfire" whiskey.

The travellers who endure the hardships of wilderness journeys usually arrive here in bad moods, and they don't care who knows it. Formerly they were merchants, messengers, even noble tourists and their entourages. With Bavmorda's rise these gave way to her minions, bandits, and fugitives. But now, even after Bavmorda's defeat, the taverns are still not garden spots.

Other landmarks in the wilderness include Fin Raziel's isle, in a lake that is actually a wide, shallow portion of River Freen (see FIN RAZIEL); and the Standing Stones, a monad group that predates recorded history.

These monoliths, weighing many tons apiece, stand on flat ground far from any river or quarry. Their arrangement, though symmetrical around a central altar, seems to hold no purpose; the stones do not predict seasonal changes. Scholars speculate that they concentrate magical energy in some fashion, but typically, no magician has commented.

The origin of the Standing Stones is usually attributed to ancient Senkadi druids (see DRUIDS), but other theories involve elves, the Mong Kok, and similar fantasies.

TIR ASLEEN

The greatest kingdom in all the land before Bavmorda's rise, Tir Asleen prospered because of its rich farmlands, a benign climate, and government by enlightened monarchs. This first and oldest kingdom extends westward to the Inland Ocean, an enormous lake, and southwest (in theory, at least) to the Stoneblades, a range of mountains that holds back the jungle.

Tir Asleen's rich folklore has inspired court poets to produce epics of unequaled merit. Chief among them stands Olvarnere's *The Return of Three*, a long verse saga telling of a king's three children who enlist in the army under assumed names to defend their homeland.

Separated in three foreign lands after devastating battles, the three—twin brothers and an older sister (Tir Asleen once permitted women in the army)—undertake dangerous journeys home, beset by monsters, bandits, and petty monarchs.

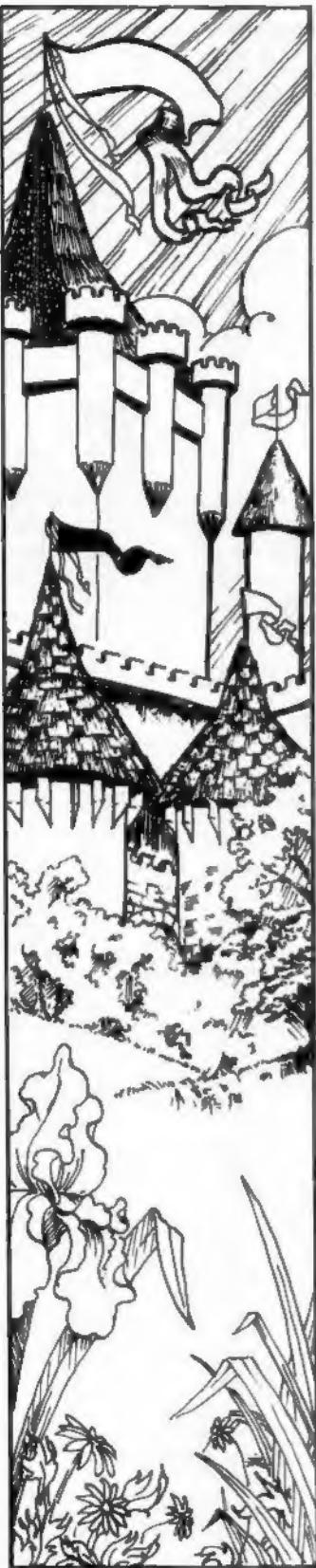
The sister and one brother reach home alive, thanks to devotion to their ideals and patriotic sentiment. The remaining brother, seduced by ambition into betraying his homeland, is quite the best drawn of the three, a villain with nobility and some charm. He leads a "devil army" against Tir Asleen. Olvarnere portrays the devils as trolls, a historical allusion to the then-recent war against the Demon Lords.

Victory over his family appears inevitable, but guilt has gradually driven him mad. In the final battle he commits several (possibly intentional) blunders that his siblings exploit to save the kingdom. As the renegade falls before his own devil troops, he shouts his repentance. The epic shines with love for Tir Asleen, perhaps the kingdom's greatest resource.

But in relying on that love, the kingdom left itself vulnerable to the skillful liar Bavmorda. Recognized in her youth as the kingdom's greatest wizard, she married into the royal family (see BAVMORDA). None of them imagined she might betray the kingdom, for what sane person would want to? Only Fin Raziel understood the threat, and she proved no match for Bavmorda.

So the sorceress entrapped the castle's citizens in quartz, and hid the city in her canyon maze. Her armies captured, killed, or chased off nearly all the citizens in the countryside, and Tir Asleen became a memory.

Bavmorda's Ritual of Obliteration not only destroyed her but expunged her magic from the kingdoms. With the



canyon maze and the quartz traps dispelled, Tir Asleen began to rebuild. Fin Raziel, Madmartigan, and Sorsha are helping, and Franjean and Rool are—if not helping, at least trying not to get in the way. Tir Asleen is expected to recover and regain much of its former magnificence.

NOCKMAAR AND THE NORTHERN WASTES

A cold, windy, desolate land of bare rock deserts. In winter, there are freezing blizzards; in summer, a pall of black smoke from the mountains drifts east across the plains, blocking the sun. The Nockmaar Mountains include several active volcanoes, but the main source of the smoke has been Nockmaar Castle, where Queen Balmorda practiced unknown rituals.

Nockmaar was habitable before Balmorda took over. During the brief summers, bluebonnets and yellow buttercups covered the plains for miles. Nomads, vassals to no kingdom, ranged the hills, carrying nothing but canvas tents, cooking tools, and weapons. They hunted seals and polar bears, and ormul, a large, shaggy-furred herd animal something like a yak.

The Nockmaar nomads used every part of the ormul, from the pelt (clothing and tents) to the bones (needles) and teeth (weapons)—and its ferocious spirit, for nomad shamans evidently bound ormul spirits into their weapons. These spears and flint axes growled during the nomads' numerous, bloody wars for supplies. The effect of this is unclear, but certainly it influenced morale on both sides of a battle.

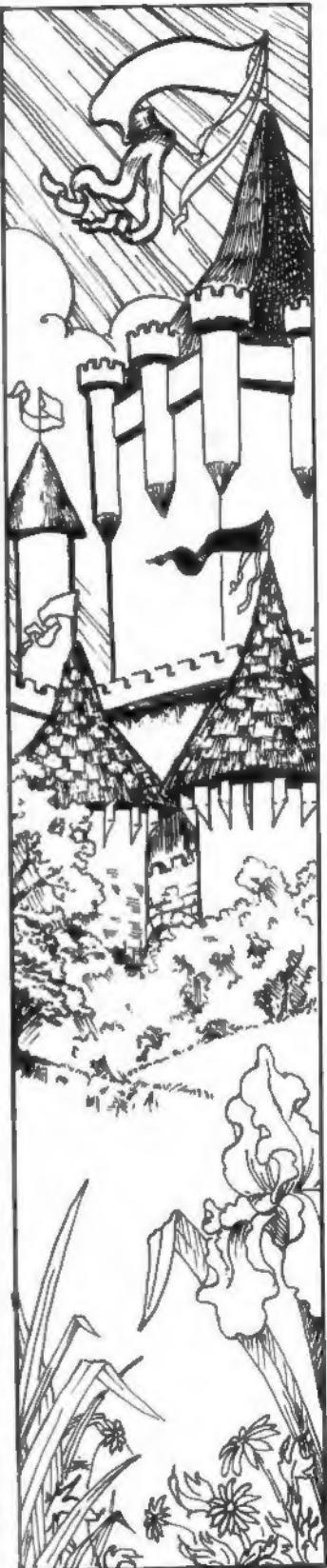
A few of these weapons survive as curiosities in the museums of great castles. But spirit-bound weapons inevitably go mad and turn on their users, and so the spells to create them have passed from favor (and perhaps even from knowledge). It is known that Balmorda flatly refused to bind her minions' weapons, because such weapons frequently destroy their makers.

The Nockmaar nomads became Balmorda's first slaves when she took power. She probably chose Nockmaar because of its proximity to Tir Asleen, and because the volcanoes suited her temperament. (She frequently remarked on their beauty, and may have encouraged their eruptions.) She enlisted the nomads, and many, many others, to build her castle.

In Nockmaar Castle, the largest ever built, some outer walls are forty feet thick, and contain guardrooms within them. Its high battlements are impervious against any physical attack, and according to Fin Raziel, enchanted against magic as well. And from the castle's tallest tower, Balmorda surveyed all the surrounding landscape, alert for stealthy approaches.

But as the old saying has it, "A castle is only as strong as its guards." Willow's plan to lure Balmorda's minions out of the castle relied on their stupidity and their savagery, both confirmed in full measure when the plan succeeded.

The castle, designed to be impregnable from outside, is less inhospitable within. No doubt Balmorda did not expect anyone to get that far. So once the knights of Galladoorn tricked their way within, they could fight the Nockmaar soldiers on even terms.



In exploring the castle after their victory, the knights found huge dungeons. Until Elora's birth, these had been filled with the expectant mothers of all of Bavmorda's territories. After Elora and Ethna escaped, the remaining women were summarily executed.

Hundreds of other prisoners had been confined and tortured there for offenses petty or great, and some dozen of these survived to gain freedom after Bavmorda's death. Their stories are not for these pages. But the atrocities they recount only confirmed and deepened citizens' hatred of the sorceress queen.

The castle is built of the dark granite called nightstone, found in the foothills of the Nockmaar Mountains, by the source of River Troon. In quarrying this rock, Bavmorda created a filthy, silty swamp and poisoned the Troon for decades. Trolls and other predators use the swamp as a base for their raids on the surrounding countryside. Bavmorda's Swamp is likely to remain a pestilential morass for many years.

The few remaining descendants of the Nockmaar nomads have given up their old life, since Bavmorda hunted the ormul to extinction. Small families survive, aging gracefully, isolated in larger villages, where they carve spirit masks for the walls of their huts. These masks, they believe, frighten away the spirit herds of ormul that seek to overrun those who hunted them.

GALLADOORN AND CASHMERE

Galladoorn, second only to Tir Asleen in prosperity, is a major southeastern trade center. (The road leading east soon bends to the south, and River Troon recrosses it several times.)

Well-known for its generous acceptance of immigrants from all lands, the kingdom maintains order through the famous knights of Galladoorn, the last fighters in the war against Bavmorda.

Cashmere, a far-off and shadowy land, is rumored to be ruled by potentates of awesome wealth. The finest silks in Willow's world are imported from Cashmere, along with many other goods. But most people in the northern kingdoms know little of this realm.

UNEXPLORED AREAS

Large reaches of land in the northern wastes and west beyond the Nockmaar Mountains have never been seen by travellers from the civilized kingdoms. At least, their reports do not survive. Leontes the Traveller made several attempts



to cross the mountains, but his reports of "foul beasts that flocked upon my trail and ahead, in numbers to darken the sky" are undoubtedly exaggerated. The mountains, miles high in places and covered with ice sheets where the volcanoes have not melted them, can defeat expeditions without the aid of Leontes's imagined dragons, cockatrices, and harpies.

To the south, the deserts are well travelled, but in a sense a desert can never be explored. The trade route tramped by a hundred caravans may, with the next sandstorm, bring forth the ruins of a buried palace. The Cashmeran culture is very old, and the potentates of early dynasties built massive structures that only the desert rats now admire.

The jungles to the west and farther south of Cashmere have been visited, but hardly more than that. And to the east, across the ocean, and to west, across the Inland Ocean, the maps fade to white. There is room for a dozen kingdoms yet to be found, and for adventures aplenty.



In a land of sorcery, a baby is born. Legend foretells the child, Elora Danan, will destroy the evil ruler, Queen Bavmorda. But Bavmorda is determined to destroy Elora first. All Bavmorda's armies, led by General Kael and Princess Sorsha, go forth to find the child.

Willow Ufgood, a gentle Nelwyn farmer, becomes the baby's reluctant guardian. Together with brave companions—the renegade swordsman, Madmartigan; the brownies, Franjean and Rool; and the sorceress Fin Raziel—Willow embarks on a quest to keep Elora Danan from Bavmorda's clutches....

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